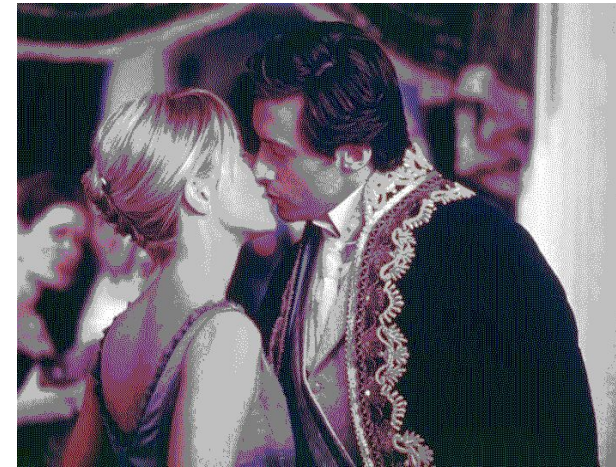
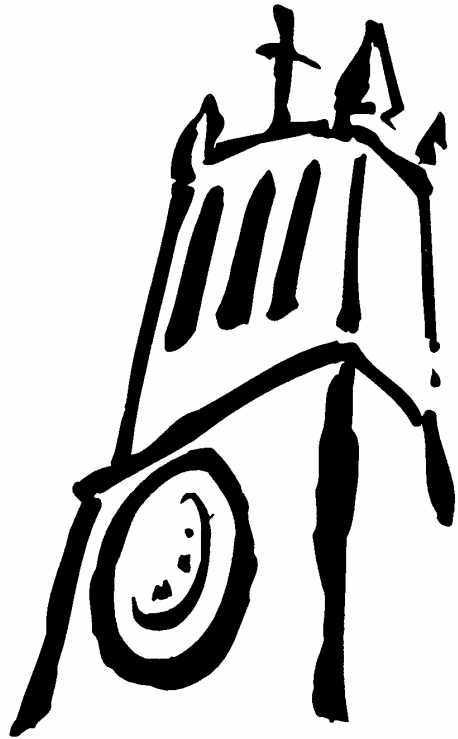


Lover's Talk



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Song of Songs
INTEGRATED BIBLE STUDY GUIDE



How to get best value out of these studies...

Welcome to this series of Old Testament studies in the book of **Song of Songs**. These Study Guides are designed in a three part format...

- 1 Opening questions to get you thinking are listed as **Discussion Starters**.
- 2 Those which get you to investigate the text are contained in the **Main Course**.
- 3 The **To finish with** section prompts you to reflect on what you've looked at and consider how it will change you and those in your group.

If you're using these Guides in a Small Group, it is vital that you have done preparatory work *before* you get to your meeting. This will be of great benefit not only to you, but to the other members of your group.

If you're doing these studies individually, make sure you let someone know you are doing so, and arrange a time to meet with them when you've finished (or even before) to let them know how your life is being changed by God's Word.

If you're after good commentaries or resources to complement your looking into the bible, speak to your Small Group Leader or one of the staff, and we'll try to be as helpful as possible. Most people aren't going to spend lots of dollars on theological works, so we're constantly on the look out for good quality titles that will result in money well spent.

We trust you'll find the guides helpful, and we welcome any feedback you can give us as you use them.

Always surround your time looking into God's Word with **prayer**, asking God to change your heart and life so that you – with God's people – might become more and more like our Lord Jesus Christ.

Recommended Reading:

- Stephen Renn** *Song of Songs, Bible Probe, Scripture Union, 1989*
- Tom Gledhill** *The Message of Song of Songs, BST, IVP, 1994*
- Barry G Webb** *Five Festal Garments, Apollos Press, 2000*
- Amelia and Greg Clarke** *One Flesh (a practical guide to honeymoon sex and beyond), Matthias Media, 2001*
- John Stott** *Issues Facing Christians 'Sex and Marriage in the Bible', Marshalls, 1984, pp. 309 – 312*

- 10 The book of Revelation concludes like the Song of Songs: with a bride calling for the one who loves her to come to her soon. Compare Rev 22:17, 20 with Songs 8:14. What are the similarities and differences between these two cries?

To finish with...

- 11 Think back over the book, what have you learned about the following:

Sex	Relationships
Creation	Heaven
God	Yourself

- 4 The word contentment in v10 is better translated 'shalom', which means peace and fulfillment in its broadest possible sense. In keeping herself for her lover, how has the beloved brought him utter contentment? Practically speaking, how as Christians do we live between ardent sexual longing and satisfied sexual bliss?
- 5 What are some of the parallels for us in longing for our full redemption at Jesus' return? See Romans 8:22-23.
- 6 A coda is a concluding movement in a song. What evidence is there that 8:8-14 quietly echoes the major themes of the book and brings them to a close?
- 7 Wisdom Literature deals not with the saving events of Israel's history, but with the everyday world of human relationships. Read Proverbs 5:1-19. How does the instruction of Proverbs compare to the experience of Song of Songs? How is Song of Songs wisdom?

Song of Songs and Heaven:

- 8 Although one flesh union remains good post-fall, it is not the ultimate contentment. Look carefully at what Jesus has to say re: the nature of heaven in Mark 12:20-27.
- 9 In heaven, both singleness and marriage will be replaced by a greater reality! What is the significance of that when dealing with the problem of aloneness in this world?



The Background to Song of Songs ...

This series is an opportunity to consider again how we relate with one another. We live in a sex-saturated society but for all our candid talk about the subject, many people remain largely unsatisfied, disillusioned and confused with their experiences. Do Christians have anything to contribute to a discussion on sexuality? And does our source book, the Bible, contain anything worth hearing on issues of sexuality?

The focus of this series will be to explore committed sex as opposed to lust, pornography and casual sex. It will try to make sense of the rather explicit sexual images in Song of Solomon, highlighting the mutual nature of the delight, the balancing between occasions for spontaneous passion and restraint, the value of praise in the context of relationships and the pain of love. It will also try to address the place of Song of Songs as part of the Bible and what it teaches us about creation and consummation. (I use the word with the double entendre!) The end result hopefully is that people learn that : ***Wise living is Wise loving.***

1

No Sex Please, We're Christians

Song of Songs is one of the most neglected books in the Bible by Christians. Its explicit sexual language has caused Christians great embarrassment over the years.

This has led to an allegorical interpretation of the book where the primary meaning found is that it symbolises the love of Christ for His Bride, the church, rather than a celebration of love between a man and a woman. These studies will assume that such an interpretation is seriously flawed as it fails to consider the natural meaning of the book, its setting in the OT wisdom literature: and as a poetic extension of Genesis 2:18-25.

Discussion Starters

- 1 Discuss the ways it is obvious we live in a sex-saturated society. Generally what sort of effect does this have on the Christian's attitude to sex?
- 2 Before meeting, read through the book in one sitting and then share with the rest of the group your reaction to the book. What are some of the characteristics of this book that make it both uncomfortable to read and difficult to interpret against the wider backdrop of the Bible?

Main Course...

- 3 Share with one another a stanza or two from your favourite piece of poetry and its significance to you. How can we enjoy poetry as truth?

4

How to be a great lover

“For love is as strong as death, Jealousy is as severe as Sheol; Its flashes are flashes of fire, The very flame of the Lord. Many waters cannot quench love, nor will rivers overflow it. If a man were to give all the riches of his house for love, It would be utterly despised.” Songs 8:6-7

Song of Songs is about the nature of love itself. It in fact is the only book of the Bible wholly devoted to this subject. True love is not just mind or will, but heart! That is true, whether we speak of love between a man and a woman, or between two friends, or between God and Israel or Christ and His Church. To love God truly, is more than obedience, it is a passion, thirst and a longing...as a bride longs for her groom.

Discussion Starters...

- 1 Longing is a particularly elusive emotion to pin down and yet all of us feel it. The difference between longing and desire is that the former hurts more and the feeling endures for longer. Longing is arguably the dominant emotion in this book. Try and think about what it is that you long for?
- 2 Discuss this statement: ‘Song of Songs is there to prevent and stop love going out of our relationships, with God, with our partner, with one another!’

Main Course...

- 3 The Song of Songs shows us that true consummation of love is not sex, but relationship. Discuss this in the light of 8:1-7. How is this a true climax to the book.

Be Courageous!:

- 9 Many singles will have experienced the loss of a significant relationship that potentially was heading towards marriage. Others will be 'single again' after a death or divorce. Pastorally, it is easy to downplay the significance of that. After reading Song of Songs, how can we do more to acknowledge the impact of these situations? Brainstorm a practical pastoral response.
- 10 If God, through these studies has raised issues related to your own sexual experiences in a fallen world, whether that be other's perversions or your own, then talk to God about this area of your life! You may even need to seek out further help. Be courageous!

- 4 How is betrothal in both Old and New Testament times significantly different to today? (See Matt 1:18-19, Deut 20:7) How does that explain the level of passionate intensity with which these single people address each other?

- 5 Assemble the cast. Using the following references , try and summarise the key characters of this song?

3:6-11

6:3

6:13

List any other minor figures.

Settings and Recurring Themes:

- 6 There are **four basic settings** for love in the book:
- | | |
|----------------------|------------------|
| i Cultivated Country | 1:15-17, 7:10-13 |
| ii Wild Country | 8:6-7 |
| iii Indoor City | 3:1-4, 8:1-4 |
| iv Outdoor City | 5:2-8 |

Glance over the book and describe the type of love connected to each of these settings.

- 7 There are at least **four recurring themes** in the book:
- i An invitation to love 4:8, 2:13
 - ii The search for the beloved 3:1-5
 - iii The security that comes from being loved 1:5, 2:16, 8:10
 - iv The praise of love itself 8:6-7

Look closely at the refrain addressed to the daughters of Jerusalem in 2:7, 3:5, 8:4. What do you think is the gist of this phrase?

- 8 We cannot read Song of Songs in isolation from the rest of the Bible as providing the definitive teaching on human sexuality. What other parts of scripture come to mind and what sort of wider framework do they provide? (Both Old and New Testament.)

To finish with...

- 9 In what contexts do Christians talk about sexual relationships? How do you measure appropriate and healthy discussion of sexual issues?

- 4 Song of Songs shares close affinities with Genesis 1-3, (creation and fall). Both deal with tensions between idealism and realism, both are set in gardens. How do you think Song of Songs is a poetic extension of Gen 2:24-25? In what ways is their love almost like a safe haven of Eden itself against the backdrop of a fallen world?
- 5 When does our desire for intimacy degenerate into a selfish desire for sexual gratification?
- 6 There is a need for restraint with this couple. Look carefully at 2:7, 3:5, 8:4. What practical steps can be taken to ensure that we *'do not arouse or awaken love until it so desires'*?
- 7 Consider the statement of God in Genesis 2:18 and the solution in Gen 2:24. At points in church history, Christians have elevated singleness to a superior state. Compare that idea with 1 Cor 7:1-7.
- 8 Song of Songs affirms the truth, "It is not good for man to be alone" Read 8:10 noting that the word for peace or satisfaction is the Jewish word 'Shalom', which literally means wholeness or completeness. If God's provision for aloneness is one flesh union and a drive towards wholeness, it follows that singles suffer very real deprivation. In our current society, where it's estimated that one third of Australian households are people living on their own, to suggest that singleness is a deprivation could be potentially explosive! Yet it is important pastorally to acknowledge that single people in a certain sense do miss out on this provision. What is an appropriate pastoral response to single people in the Christian community?

3

Love in a Fallen World

“With urgent desperation, I sought my absent lover. I sought but did not find him. The stolid watchmen of the night, the city walls patrolling, they took me for a wandering girl of doubtful reputation. They beat me, stripped me of my outer dress and left me crying in distress.” Songs 5:6-7

The composer of this song describes sexual longing. He knows about erotic dreams, meddling relatives and the struggle to pursue relationship in a world beyond Eden. Love can easily turn to lust, the beloved can dream of love-making and equally of rape, (5:7)

Discussion Starters...

- 1 What are some of the signs in this book that the couple live in a fallen world? How is their love spoiled or threatened? Consider 1:6, 2:15, 8:6, 8:8-9
- 2 Does absence always make the heart grow fonder?

Main Course...

- 3 Look carefully at the two dream sequences of the book: 3:1-4, 5:2-8. Describe them in your own words. What are some of the apprehensions, dangers, and cruelties of love and sex in a fallen world?

2

Pillow Talk

*“O to feel the deepness of the kisses of your mouth!
Your gentle touch intoxicates, your fondling strokes inflame,
A heady wine more potent than any ancient vintage.”*

The language in Song of Songs is nothing less than sensuous! In this study we will encounter a lot of description of various male and female body parts and the delights of tasting, seeing, hearing, touching and smelling. The statements made by the beloved and the lover cannot be tested empirically. This is love poetry from beginning to end. It is not a philosophical treatise on love, nor a sex manual. There is an intimacy in this book which is both delightful and embarrassing. The lovers are not aware of us and what they say is for each other. Sometimes we may feel an element of voyeurism. This study will help us to understand what it is to be in love and to make love.

Discussion Starters...

- 1 Brainstorm as many ‘love songs’ as you can. Critically consider whether the lyrics of these songs reveal an idealistic and flawed view of love. Where are they spot on?
- 2 This book assumes that sexual intercourse is contained within the safety of the marriage relationship. What other biblical resources support this notion?

Main Course...

- 3 Try to put the lover’s compliments to his betrothed in today’s words. *If male, then read 4: 1-7, if female, read 5:10-16.* What is the difference between mere flattery and genuine compliment?

4 How important is physical attraction as a factor to be considered in a man/woman relationship? Is it a mark of vanity that we should desire to enhance our physical attractiveness?

5 How easy do you find it to articulate your praise of the one you love? As Australians, we live in a culture of knocking people as a form of affection. A key insight of Song of Songs is that praise and delight in the other is foundational for building relationships as God intended. For those without a lover, this concept can be broadened out to all our relationships. Discuss how you can be counter-cultural in this way.

6 One of the difficulties of the poetry of Song of Songs is interpreting the precise meaning of the words. There is much double entendre. Read 7:1-10 and compare this with the supplied free paraphrase below.

*“O tall and stately lady, so slender and slim,
A gracious supple palm you are, so calm in nature’s sweet allure,
Such teasing inaccessibility, aloof, serene.
Your breasts so soft, so gentle, so full of promise,
Clusters of the tender vine, O to be mine, their fruit to taste!*

*Methinks with resolution strong, to climb the tree, its trunk to scale
And hold her leafy fronds, to take..
her slender form, her glistening locks caress.
Your rounded swelling breasts to me, be clusters of desire.
Your fragrant nostrils’ scent be that of luscious lime.*

*The taste and motion of your mouth,
The smoothness of your silken kisses,
Be as the languid flow of vintage wine o’er sweet and liquid lips
T’is me, t’is me, t’is me, he longs for,
His passion is for me!”*

7 The Song says virtually nothing about the procreation of children. What is the significance of that pastorally and theologically when it comes to understanding sex?

8 Although the relationship between a man and a woman is not always symmetrical, it can still be equal. Look closely at the initiative of the woman in lovemaking in 8:10-13, 4:16. How does this provide a helpful breaking of stereotypical views about men, women and sex?

9 In what ways ought human love to mirror the love of God? Use 1 Corinthians 13:1-13 as a helpful comparison to the love in Song of Songs.

To finish with...

10 What does it mean to have a ‘selfless marriage’? Discuss some practical ways in which such a selflessness might be expressed.

11 What importance should be attached to sexual satisfaction in marriage?

12 **If you are married...** honestly evaluate the present place of sexual intimacy in your relationship. If it is neglected, consider ways to revitalise your relationship with your spouse. (It may/may not be beneficial for the wider group to hear about this!)

13 **If single...** is it helpful to fantasise about your own possible future marriage?