

Family Seasons

The Royal Love Song

Lesson #6 for May 11, 2019

Scriptures: Song of Solomon; Genesis 2:7; 1 Corinthians 7:3-5; John 17:3; 1 John 1:9; Romans 1:24-27; Galatians 5:24.

1. This lesson will attempt to discuss the spiritual implications and applications of one of the most important seasons of our lives, the event of marriage and the sexuality accompanying it.
2. God intended for husbands and wives to “become one flesh.” Each individual has a set of dominant characteristics that needs to be balanced by the characteristics of another significantly different person. As we come to care about our future spouses and hopefully learn to go out of our way to make them happy, we learn some of the most difficult and some of the most important lessons about love; love is a predominant feature of God’s character. Under ideal circumstances we each can learn to become more like God as our natural characteristics blend into that “one flesh” condition. Sexuality and the desire to have that most intimate relationship with our spouses should be one of the reasons why we are willing to accept such changes.
3. We need to be honest up front and admit that as one Adventist author put it: God invented sex!
4. Satan, who is determined to do everything he can to destroy the work of God and promote his characteristic—selfishness—instead of love, has worked to pervert marriage in every way he can. A quick look around at our world will convince almost anyone how successful Satan has been!
5. The reading of the Song of Solomon is not attempted very often. And even when it is read, many do not understand the images being presented there. It is read annually by Jews on the Sabbath during Passover.
6. Many of the more puritanical Reformation theologians have tried to make this a book only about God’s relationship to His people or even Christ’s relationship to the church. While some of that may be true, it is first and foremost the story of a relationship between a Shulamite maiden and probably King Solomon himself.
7. Those who have tried to suggest that this book is all about some allegorical meaning have really struggled to explain all the very explicit sexual ideas found in this book. On the other hand, the fact that marriage is supposed to be a very exclusive and intimate relationship with just one other person who is different than we are should teach us about our relationship with the one true God.
8. Read Genesis 2:7; Psalm 63:1; 84:2; 1 Corinthians 6:19-20; and 1 Thessalonians 5:23. These verses clearly present the idea that God wants to have a very close and intimate relationship with each one of us.
9. Unfortunately, many of the Christian religions today take a dualistic approach to their understanding of the human body. Seventh-day Adventists believe that the body plus the spirit—otherwise known as *the breath*—make a *soul/person*. They are a single unit; what affects the body affects the spirit and affects the soul; there is no separating them except in death. And in death, they all cease to exist physically, sooner or later.
10. Think of all the perversions of God’s ideal that have crept into religion through the centuries. As we know, there are large groups of people who believe that to be really religious, one must avoid marriage and devote oneself completely to other aspects of life. God could have designed a large variety of other ways for humans to reproduce themselves. Why do you think God chose this particular way? God wants us to learn about intimate relationships.
11. It was God who designed the human body. No doubt, He thought that He had done a marvelous job in creation! He said, “It was very good!” (Genesis 1:31, *KJV**) There is an apocryphal story that after God had made Adam, He took one good look, and said, “I can do better than that!”
12. Read Song of Solomon 1:2,13; 2:6; 5:10-16; 7:1-9. In these passages the sexual aspects of the human body and the sexual behaviors normally involved in intimacy are clearly spelled out.

There are lips covered with kisses, breasts, beautiful hands that caress, eyes that are beautiful, thighs like columns of alabaster, kisses that are sweet, feet that are beautiful in sandals, artistic curves of thighs, beautiful noses, shiny braided hair, and breath like the fragrance of apples, etc.

13. But, unfortunately, as we well know, even this most intimate of relationships that is supposed to teach us about God's love, can be turned into something that is even abusive to a marriage partner.
14. Almost every culture has some sexual taboos. Many cultures forbid parents to speak openly to their children about sex. Sometimes, there is a special session held just before the marriage takes place to try to inform the two new partners separately about what to expect.
15. While many of the more primitive cultures have sexual taboos, and thus, prevent couples from having almost any real understanding of what true Christian love as expressed in sexuality is supposed to be all about, Western society has come to think that one must experiment with different partners in order to find one that best suits his/her personal needs. This very selfish approach to sexuality and many other aspects of this most intimate of relationships has proven to be very destructive to true Christian marriages. No wonder there are so many divorces.
16. How much are we as Seventh-day Adventists influenced by the cultural norms around us? Some think sexual intimacy is supposed to be some kind of animal-like passion while others think it is something shameful that must never be talked about. The Bible dismisses each of those extremes.
17. While the entire book of Song of Solomon is about love, note especially the aspects of love mentioned in these verses: Song of Solomon 1:2,13; 2:10-13,16; 3:11; 4:1-7; 5:16; 6:6; 7:1-9; 8:6-7. In very beautiful terms in exquisite Hebrew poetry, the various aspects of sexual love are described.
18. Two very important principles are particularly emphasized in this book. First, the fact that marriage partners are supposed to be initially, good friends. They are to get to know each other well and to learn how to communicate with each other in as many different ways as possible apart from sex. By far the best marriages are marriages in which the husbands and wives are best friends.
19. It is absolutely essential that couples get to know each other well before they engage in a sexual relationship. Otherwise, the sexual relationship may begin to dominate their thinking about each other and cause them to overlook other aspects of their relationship which are also important.
20. Throughout the poem, intimate compliments and loving gestures convey the strong attraction, the physical and emotional delight, that the male and female find in each other. The natural intimacies of romantic love are a gift of the Creator to help partners bond closely to each other in marriage. As partners are open to the work of divine love in their hearts, the "human love is refined and purified, elevated and ennobled," a "foretaste of heaven."

The divine love emanating from Christ never destroys human love, but includes it. By it human love is refined and purified, elevated and ennobled. Human love can never bear its precious fruit until it is united with the divine nature, and trained to go heavenward. Jesus wants to see happy marriages, happy firesides. The warmth of true friendship and the pure love that bind the hearts of husband and wife are a foretaste of heaven.—Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times*,* September 6, 1899, par. 8; *AH** 99.4.

21. Let us be honest enough to recognize that real Godlike love is not natural for human beings. It is only the molding, sanctifying process of the work of the Holy Spirit that can transform us into truly-loving marriage partners. And we are happy to say that that ideal relationship between a husband and a wife which will lead to ever-growing love for each other is the perfect environment in which to raise children. Children should always be planned for and never just accidents!
22. So, how does this kind of sexual intimacy reflect, in its own way, the kind of intimacy we can have

with God? Can you name some parallels? God loves to have us spend time with Them—Father, Son, and/or Holy Spirit. They bless us when we give ourselves completely to Them. Could one feel the same closeness to God that one might have in a good marriage? In what ways might it be different? How is our relationship with a spouse different from that with God?

23. Many scholars, especially those familiar with the original languages, think of the Song of Solomon poem as being almost as idyllic as the Garden of Eden. We are familiar with what the Scripture says about the creation of Adam and then Eve. What kind of marital counseling did God give Adam and Eve? Or, did He just expect them to discover things for themselves? Don't you wish we had a record of all of God's instructions for our first parents?
24. Read Genesis 2:24-25. Why were Adam and Eve naked but not ashamed or embarrassed? Was that because there were no other humans around? What about the angels and even God the Father and God the Son. Weren't they around? In what ways were these other Beings perceived as being not "bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh"?
25. Read Song of Solomon 4:7-5:1. These verses found in the center of the book are supposed to be the highlight, the consummation of the marriage. Compare Paul's words.

1 Corinthians 7:3-4: ³A man should fulfil his duty as a husband, and a woman should fulfil her duty as a wife, and each should satisfy the other's needs. ⁴A wife is not the master of her own body, but her husband is; in the same way a husband is not the master of his own body, but his wife is.—American Bible Society. (1992). *The Holy Bible: The Good News Translation** (2nd ed., 1 Corinthians 7:3-4). New York: American Bible Society.

26. In the best of relationships, this is a perfect ideal. But, think of how this ideal has been perverted, especially by males, even outside of marriage in ways that have damaged and destroyed the lives of so many women. In the passage we read just above, note especially Song of Solomon 4:8,16 and 5:1 and how clearly what is pictured there is a mutual attraction with no force or manipulation in any way.
27. It is interesting to notice that both Solomon's and his Shulamite bride's names are derived from the Hebrew word *shalom* meaning *peace* or *wholeness*. Notice that their expression: "My beloved is mine, and I am his" (Song of Solomon 2:16) really is an echo of the language in Eden: "This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh." (Genesis 2:23, *KJV**)
28. In the traditional language of the *King James Version* which reflects the language used by the original authors in Hebrew and Greek, the word *know* is used to describe the sexual relationship. See Genesis 4:1,25; 1 Samuel 1:19; Luke 1:34; John 17:3; and 1 Corinthians 8:3. In what ways is this *knowing* supposed to be a reflection of our relationship with God Himself?

Know also describes the relationship between individuals and God. For the discerning Christian the unique and tender knowledge of marriage, with its companionship, commitment, and unbounded delight, provides a profound insight into the most sublime and holy mystery ever, the union of Christ and the church.—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Tuesday, May 7. [Italic type is in source.]

29. How can our relationship with God bring "companionship, commitment, and unbounded delight"? Have we each had that experience? How can God bring us "unbounded delight"?
30. **The second major theme in the book of Song of Solomon is that sex should be preserved until the right time.** Read Song of Solomon 4:8-5:1. The beautiful Shulamite woman is described as *a secret garden, a walled garden, a private spring*. These delights are not intended to be shared with anyone except the marriage partner either before marriage or after. Later, that garden is described as belonging exclusively to him. "Let my lover come to his garden and eat the best of its fruit." And the man responds, "I am drinking my wine and milk."
31. Scholars will remind you that the book of Song of Solomon is arranged in what is described as

a chiasm in which the ideas and wording of the book work up to a peak and then descend in reverse sequence toward the end of the book. The beginning is reflected at the end.

32. The exclusivity of this relationship is described in Song of Solomon 4:12,16; 5:1; 8:8-10.

In the Song of Solomon, we find some of Scripture's most compelling evidence for God's plan that people remain sexually chaste until marriage. One of the most powerful is a reference to the Shulamite's childhood, when her brothers wondered whether she would be a "wall" or a "door" (*Song of Sol. 8:8, 9*). In other words, will she remain chaste until marriage (a wall) or be promiscuous (a door). As an adult woman, she affirms that she has maintained her chastity and comes pure to her husband: "I am a wall" (*Song of Sol. 8:10*). In fact, he confirms that she is still a virgin up to their wedding night by saying that she is "a garden inclosed . . . a spring shut up, a fountain sealed" (*Song of Sol. 4:12*). From her own experience, she can counsel her friends to take the steps of love and marriage very carefully. Three times in the Song of Solomon the Shulamite addresses a group of women referred to as the "daughters of Jerusalem" to counsel them not to arouse the intense passion of love until the appropriate time (*Song of Sol. 2:7, 3:5, 8:4*); that is, until they find themselves safely within the intimate covenant of marriage, as is she.—*Ibid.** Wednesday, May 8.

For the second time in the poem the beloved invites his bride to come away with him (*Song of Sol. 2:10, 4:8*). Before the wedding she could not accept his invitation, but now it is she who invites him to her garden (*Song of Sol. 4:16*), and he gladly accepts (*Song of Sol. 5:1*). He is not just attracted to her beauty; she has stolen his heart (*Song of Sol. 4:9*), he is intoxicated with her love (*Song of Sol. 4:10*), and he is exuberant that she is his and nobody else's now and forever: "My bride, my very own, you are a garden, a fountain closed off to all others" (*Song of Sol. 4:12, CEV*). In his union to this perfect woman he finds himself as reaching the Promised Land: "Your lips are a honeycomb; milk and honey flow from your tongue" (*Song of Sol. 4:11, CEV*).—*Ibid.** [Italic type is in source.]

33. Do you think that Solomon ever really felt this way about any woman, a woman who was like him? If so, what did all of the other wives and concubines think about her?
34. We need to be honest when discussing a lesson like this that we do not turn off all those who may have been tempted to follow some forbidden pathways in the past. Read 1 John 1:9; Psalm 103:12; Isaiah 55:7; and John 8:11. God is eternally forgiving. He died to prove that He has the right to forgive our sins.
35. In creation, God apparently made Adam and gave him some of His own characteristics. Then, He created Eve and gave her some of His other characteristics. It is only when they come together in the "one flesh" relationship that they can form a perfect image to the Father God.
36. Why did God make us the first group ever, as far as we know, to be able to reproduce ourselves? Had He already foreseen what was coming? Remember that He only made two of us. And He told our parents to multiply and fill the earth.
37. Try to imagine what the universe would be like if Satan had the ability to reproduce himself! The universe would be full of little satans!
38. We cannot address the issue of marriage in our current society in Western culture without dealing with some of the variations of marriage that seem to be taking over our world. See Leviticus 20:7-21; Romans 1:24-27; and 1 Corinthians 6:9-20. In the book of Leviticus, Moses, being directed by God, stated that any variation from the original plan of God was to be dealt with by death. Adultery, incest, and homosexuality were to be treated the same. Do you think God still feels the same way? Why were Sodom and Gomorrah destroyed? Why do you think God made these very strong statements back at that point in human history? Remember that, in the end, God will treat all sinners as His children and admit to heaven everyone that is safe to have there.

39. Read Romans 8:1-14; 1 Corinthians 6:50-20; 2 Corinthians 10:5; Galatians 5:24; Colossians 3:3-10; and 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24. In these passages which were all written by the apostle Paul, he addressed some of the flagrant perversions rampant in the world in which he lived. He told us that when we choose to have a relationship with a prostitute, we are uniting ourselves with that person; Christians whose bodies are part of the body of Christ should recognize that that is impossible! When we commit adultery or incest or homosexuality, we are committing sins against our own bodies.

40. What does it mean to think of your body as the temple of God?

God forgives those who repent of sin (*1 John 1:9*). The gospel enables individuals who formerly engaged in promiscuity and sinful sexual activity to be part of the fellowship of believers. Because of the extent to which sin has altered sexuality in humanity, some may not be able to know full restoration in this aspect of human experience. Some, for example, might choose a life of celibacy rather than get involved in any sexual relationships that are forbidden by God's Word.

How should we as a church relate to, for instance, homosexuals? How should their own attitude about their sexual orientation influence our response?—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Thursday, May 9. [Italic type is in source.]

Marriage has received Christ's blessing, and it is to be regarded as a sacred institution. True religion is not to counterwork the Lord's plans. God ordained that man and woman should be united in holy wedlock, to raise up families that, crowned with honor, would be symbols of the family in heaven. And at the beginning of His public ministry Christ gave His decided sanction to the institution that had been sanctioned in Eden. Thus He declared to all that He will not refuse His presence on marriage occasions, and that marriage, when joined with purity and holiness, truth and righteousness, is one of the greatest blessings ever given to the human family.—Ellen G. White, *Daughters of God** 180.2-181.0.

41. Sexual love can be a wonderful, exhilarating experience. But, the beauty of our outward physical bodies will not remain forever. Age brings deterioration and decay, and there is no way to prevent that in our world. Nevertheless, Solomon and the Shulamite talked about a lifelong, committed relationship because they belonged to each other. See Song of Solomon 2:16; 6:3; 7:10.

42. How would you compare Solomon's description of the Shulamite (Song of Solomon 4:1-5; 6:8; 7:1-9) with Adam's expression when he first saw Eve? (Genesis 2:23) Do we who are married still feel that way about our spouses? Or, are only men supposed to feel that way about their wives? See Ephesians 5:21-25.

43. Are you comfortable with the idea that God invented sex? What does that imply for our personal relationship with our spouses? There are many passages in Scripture that point this idea out. (Genesis 1:28; 4:1; 9:1; Exodus 20:14; Leviticus 18:1-30; Proverbs 6:32; 1 Corinthians 6:9; Galatians 5:19; and Hebrews 13:4)

Seventh-day Adventists believe that bodies matter. What happens to the body is going to affect who a person is or becomes. Our belief in this causal relationship stems from our conviction that humans are a wholistic unity of both physical and nonphysical dimensions. A maxim often heard when discussing biblical anthropology is "A human doesn't have a soul; a human *is* a soul" (*see Gen. 2:7*). That means that bodily actions, such as eating, exercising, physical contact, and sex, are *soulish* activities and are not to be thought of as events isolated from affecting the whole person. Because God has created our bodies and has a serious stake in our well-being, it should be no surprise that He has something to say about our sexual lives. He knows just how important a subject it is. If any think that God is squeamish about the topic and has austere or puritanical restrictions on sexuality, then we commend to you the Song of Solomon.—*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** 80. [Italic type is in source.]

How one views the relationship of our material dimension (our bodies) to our immaterial dimension (our mental, emotional, spiritual states) has a tremendous influence on how we live. One of the most influential theological breaks our church made with existing Christian tradition was to view the human as a whole rather than as a duality. Though we believe that a person is multifaceted (physical, spiritual, mental, emotional), we believe all those dimensions are woven into a complex whole in which each dimension affects the other. Repercussions of this view are immediately apparent on a number of theological topics. One may be tempted to think that the Adventist Church holds unique positions on any number of independent subjects, such as Creation, resurrection, death, hell, sanctification, and health. But these positions are based on the biblical relationship of the human psyche with human physicality. It is our view of the wholeness of humans that informs, and sets us apart from, the dualism of fellow Christians.—*Ibid.** 80-81.

44. You may not think that gnosticism has anything to do with Christian life in our times. But, any time that you think your body is not as important as what is done in your soul, you are in danger of flirting with the gnostic dualistic philosophies and their consequences.

Another problem with this view, besides its variance with biblical wholism, is that it directly violates our experience. Sexuality is meant to be as much an act of the heart and spirit as it is of the body and, ideally, is to be an expression of a very nonphysical entity we call *love*. Again, those in recovery from abusing their bodies in any number of ways (food, sex, drugs, etc.) are often led to realize the core of their issues as nonphysical (e.g., one's self-image, dysfunctional relationships, emotional issues). In conclusion, our spiritual/relational life with one another, with God, and with ourselves is dramatically affected by what we do in our bodies. The physical affects the spiritual and vice versa. This conclusion can be leveraged to support biblical principles of sexuality, premarital physical involvement, substance abuse, and health/wellness issues....

While traditional/biblical values on sexual abstinence until marriage are often mocked as being an idealistic and antiquated killjoy, it turns out the opposite may be the case. There is evidence that having numerous sexual partners before committing to a single partner for life (in marriage) can undermine the prospects of a "high-quality marriage."—See Galena K. Rhoades and Scott M. Stanley, "Before 'I Do': What Do Premarital Experiences Have to Do With Marital Quality Among Today's Young Adults?" (Charlottesville, Va.: The National Marriage Project), p. 5. Let that sink in for a moment. God should *never* be seen as restricting human pleasure, only as regulating it in order to *maximize* it in the proper time. Here our second theme, timely love, comes into play: the *leitmotif* of the Shulamite, charging the daughters of Jerusalem to "not stir up or awaken love until it pleases" (*Song of Sol.* 2:7, 3:5, 8:4, *ESV*). Sexuality not only was meant to be expressed with a single mate for life ("his eyes are as the eyes of doves" [*Song of Sol.* 5:12]; doves are known to mate for life), but was intended to be preserved till a threshold of personal and relational maturity was reached.—*Ibid.** 81-82. [Italic type is in source.]

45. There are some poor souls who are literally destroying whatever capacity they had for sexual pleasure through illicit sexual activity. Through the Song of Solomon and other passages in Scripture, God is trying to use whatever means He can to preserve and maximize the emotional, relational, spiritual, and yes, physical satisfaction that marriage can bring. We should praise Him for it.

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