

The Song Sermon 1 – Deepening Desire

The Song of Solomon, or Song of Songs, is one of the most interesting, unique books in the Bible. Nothing else is like it. Psalms has poetry, but not like this. Ruth and Esther have love stories, but not like this one. Paul talked about marriage, but not as Song of Solomon does. This book of the Bible is a little difficult to understand, a little out of place (at first glance), and even a little uncomfortable. But what Song of Solomon contains is worth navigating the cultural language, the poetic descriptions, and even the inevitable blushing because it accurately and beautifully conveys the emotions of a very real, very passionate love story.

Before we get into some specific study in this book, I need to put everything on the table: this book talks about a young couple meeting and getting to know each other; it talks about engagement and the excitement that brings; it talks about the wedding—and the wedding night; it talks about sex; it talks about conflict. It’s all here, and we’re not going to shy away from it. Because while some of that stuff seems at times uncomfortable or out of place in church, the truth is that it’s real life. And I love that this slice of real life is in Scripture—because it’s a great reminder to us that God created and cares about *all* of life, even this part of it.

As we begin this study of attraction, love, marriage, and everything that comes with it, we’re going to start at the beginning: attraction. Something in all of us is made to feel attraction, and how we process and handle it is important. In fact, I love that this book is called a “song,” because love, at its most beautiful, is just that, and how the song starts is just as important as how it progresses.

I think we tend to ask ourselves three important questions in the beginning phase of a romantic relationship, so let’s analyze those three questions in the order they typically come up:

What Do I Want?

The first question most people ask, whether out loud or just in their minds, is something like this: “What do I want?” That’s a good question. I remember being a fourteen-year-old, just in high school, and making a list of all the things I wanted to look for in a wife. Yes, at fourteen. Some of that list is funny now, and some of it is pretty cool because I found it in my wife: beautiful, smart, funny. The typical stuff.

Attraction begins with what we want. That’s what attraction *is*. One of the ways the dictionary describes it is, “something that attracts or is intended to attract people by appealing to their desires and tastes.” It involves what we want. That’s OK! If I wasn’t attracted physically, mentally, intellectually, and emotionally to my wife, we wouldn’t have been able to spend the hours together that we did when we were dating.

Do you remember that first moment of attraction? Remember all those feelings? Maybe, if you have that in your minds, you can feel some of it when you see this first meeting, too:

Play video clip, Deepening Desire (1:17–1:57).

Not too much is that noteworthy. It might just have been an insignificant meeting, but when attraction is involved, it becomes something different, something memorable, something . . . life-changing.

We see this kind of attraction in Song of Solomon. Look at chapter one, verses 9–11:

Read Song of Solomon 1:9–11.

This is the first time we hear from the man in Song of Solomon, and he was talking about—what else?—how beautiful this woman was. The image he used in verse 9 is a really fun one. The word *harnessed* that you see in some translations isn't actually in the original Hebrew writing. It was the translators' attempt to understand this image. But the sentence actually makes a lot more sense without that added word. He said that she was like “a mare among Pharaoh's chariot horses.” This was a common battle tactic—releasing a female horse around the enemy's chariots, and the male horses would get distracted and could no longer pull the chariots. That's what the man said his beloved woman was like—a distraction so powerful, so beautiful that he couldn't focus on anything else.

He talked about her cheeks and her jewelry, and he was drawn to it. *Attraction.* This is what he wanted. And that's a good thing!

She had a few things to say as well. Look back at verse 2:

Read Song of Solomon 1:2–4.

She was obviously seeing something she wanted in him, too. This was not a bland, emotionless arrangement of two people. There was passion here. She wanted him to kiss her; she said she would rather be loved by him than enjoy good food and drink. In verse 3 she said he smelled good. He had put on cologne, and she liked it. She was drawn to it.

But something else she said was even more important, and it moves us to the next question we inherently ask in attraction:

What Do I Need?

You can be attracted to physical beauty, cologne, and other outward appearances, and that's all great, but if it doesn't get deeper at some point, the romance is doomed to die. Look at what the woman said in the last part of verse 3:

Read Song of Solomon 1:3.

She was drawn to his *name*. Here's what I *don't* think she was talking about: she wasn't talking about the junior-high girl who writes “Brad” on the front of her notebook and decorates it with hearts. The woman in Song of Solomon didn't love his *name* like that. I think she meant something more along the lines of what we mean when we say “in Jesus' *name* we pray.” We don't mean that the name “Jesus” sounds really cool and we want to say it in our prayers just

because we like it. What we mean by “name” is reputation, character, the whole person. And I think that’s what she was getting at here.

She added onto that: “No wonder the young women love you.” I think some of the other women in the city were physically drawn, just as she was, to this guy, yet there was more to it. Everyone in town loved him because of his *name*.

This is a good check for us when we’re attracted to someone or beginning a romantic relationship: does anyone else see the good things we see? It’s easy in the midst of infatuation to think that she or he is the most wonderful thing to ever walk the face of the earth. But if your friends don’t agree with you about this person’s *name*, that is, his or her reputation or character, it’s time to draw the line.

That’s hard to do. We tend to find every excuse we can to write off what other people do or don’t see in them, but that’s where this second question becomes so crucial: what do you *need*? At some point, hopefully sooner than later, your relationship is going to have to move from physical attraction to something deeper. What you *need* is not someone you think is pretty or wears great cologne. What you need is someone of character, someone you can trust, someone who treats you with respect, someone who will follow Jesus with you. At some point you have to ask the question: what am I truly attracted to? Is it superficial or is there substance there? Will this person help me know God more fully?

And that leads us to the third question we need to ask in this process:

What Does God Want?

At some point, those of us who want to follow Jesus with our whole lives have to ask the question, “What does God want?” Because, like I said earlier, this is a part of life that God cares about. As Christians, this decision isn’t up to just us. We need to line up with what he wants.

I love what the woman said in Song of Solomon 3:5: “Daughters of Jerusalem, I charge you . . . do not arouse or awaken love until it so desires.” She had already been talking about how much she loved this man, how attracted she was to him, and how she longed to be with him, but she could also see with wisdom that once this process had begun, it had a natural course it would run. And if you let it get started, it can easily run out of control. She was talking about restraining the desire he had developed in her. And she would make this statement two more times in Song of Solomon: Do not arouse or awaken love until it so desires. Even though attraction has been aroused, it still involves restraint and patience. Sex needs to be saved for marriage. This is one of God’s commands to us that is not easy, is not always fun, and is not what the world around us portrays. But at some point on this journey, we must involve God and do things his way.

But part of our problem is that we usually think of it just that way, that at some point we need to check in and be sure God’s OK with this. But like anything else in our lives, God doesn’t want to be a second, third, fourth, or last resort. God has the first say. Our bodies and our society, however, follow that order of the questions: What do I want, what do I need, and then what does God have to say about it? The order needs to be reversed!

The results of allowing ourselves to go unchecked in this area can be disastrous. We can learn a lot of things from this love story and from the story of Solomon in general, but one of the most important is that we can't let our own choices, decisions, desires, or attractions short-circuit God's will.

We know the story of Solomon. God told him he could have anything he wanted, and Solomon asked for wisdom (2 Chronicles 1). Solomon was wise, incredibly wise. He had God's wisdom at his disposal, enough to write most of the book of Proverbs. And Solomon seems wise in his actions as the man in Song of Solomon. He sought God's will first, and it led to great wealth, power, and success. But at some point, Solomon let the tide turn, and he started making the decisions himself. He let the physical, cultural course of things run free . . . and it led to disaster for Solomon and the kingdom of Israel.

When Jesus is the king of your life, it doesn't mean you get to call the shots and check in with God at some point down the road to be sure he's still going to take care of you. When Jesus is king, it means he calls the shots.

So we need to be careful to heed the woman's advice: Do not arouse or awaken love until the right time. God needs to be the first check and balance, and he needs to hold the trump card. But once we let our flesh start to call the shots, it gets harder and harder to stop.

Yet if we can reverse the order of those questions and start by asking God what he wants, chances are we will find a love like the one in Song of Solomon, and it will become its own song. And if you haven't done that, God still wants to write a song with your marriage. If it didn't start out by letting him in, I think God would tell you that it's better late than never, and he can take your marriage and make it sing a more beautiful song than you ever thought was possible.