



Bible Study Series:

Song of Songs



Our Mission:

*To glorify God together in response to his grace
by making disciples of Jesus Christ*

About These Studies

These studies were written by various SMACC leaders for use among young working adults and university students. You are most welcome to use and adapt these studies for your own context. Where you do so please provide the following acknowledgment.

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These studies are written as a companion to the sermon series available at:
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Study 1: “Looking at One’s Partner” (Song of Songs 1:1-2:7)

Getting Started

1. We know that reading erotic novels (akin to pornography) is wrong as it stirs up lust and wrong desires. Discuss how and if it is different to read of erotic love in the Song of Songs.

Context

Read through the whole book.

Introduction to Song of Songs

It goes without saying that the themes of romantic love and sexual intimacy feature prominently in Song of Songs. We see the themes rightly expressed within the marriage covenant. However, it is not the most straightforward endeavour to interpret what the love poetry means at different points and how its themes develop.

As noted by the ESV Study Bible (Kindle Locations 173211-173215, Crossway):

“The Song of Songs, or Song of Songs (1: 1), contains beautiful and sensuous poetry expressing romantic love between a young man (a shepherd, 1: 7) and a young woman (a shepherdess, 1: 8) in ancient Israel. On this point there is general agreement; but agreement ends once the discussion moves to how the Song of Songs works to convey its theme. The Song of Songs has in fact been subject to a broader range of interpretation probably than any other book in the Bible.”

Nonetheless, for the purpose of this study, the adopted outline is as per the Songs-Shulamite Interpretation, whereby the two primary characters are King Songs and the unnamed Shulamite woman, and the general structure as below (more or less):

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|--------------|
| 1. Title: The Best of Songs | (1: 1) |
| 2. The Lovers Yearn for Each Other | (1: 2– 3: 5) |
| 3. The Wedding | (3: 6– 5: 1) |
| 4. Temporary Separation and Reunion | (5: 2– 6: 3) |
| 5. Delight in Each Other/Restoration | (6: 4– 8: 4) |
| 6. Final Affirmations of Love | (8: 5– 14) |

While there are many intimate descriptions up till 3:5 even before the wedding, one can generally infer/interpret this section leading up to 3:5 to be mainly an expression of strong desire (to marry him also) instead of actual actions of the lovers. This view can be supported by seeing that the main speaker in 1:2 – 3:5 is the woman and that the man’s part are largely praises for her, with the verses that describe his intimate actions actually spoken by the woman – likely her expressing her strong feelings.

Digging Deeper

Song of Songs 1:1 – 2:7

2. How many groups of speakers do you see in the verses read? How are they generally structured?

3. From v.2-4, what is it about the beloved which the woman is greatly attracted to?

4. From v.5-6, what do we learn about the woman's background? How do you think she feels of herself?

5. How does v.7-8 give us one of the first pictures of the mutual affection between the Shulamite woman (the shepherdess) and her beloved (the shepherd)?

6. Look at the sections where the man speaks (v. 8-10; 15; 2:2). What is the common praise and expression of affection that he has for the shepherdess? What is striking to you about this seeing what we know about the woman from Question 3.

7. From v.12-14, we see the woman describing her beloved like a sachet of myrrh and cluster of henna blossoms. Contextually, it is thought that the former is like a perfume a woman wears at night so that she will smell fragrant in the morning (*NKJV - A bundle of myrrh is my beloved to me, that lies all night between my breasts*), and the latter is a reference to flower blossoms in the oasis called En-ge-di, full of life and giving out nice smells.

What do you think was going through the woman's mind when she referred to the beloved with those metaphors?

8. Now that we have a better picture of the relationship between the Shulamite and her beloved, what's the dominant feeling of the Shulamite from 2:3-6? Why do you think the refrain in v.7 comes up abruptly?

Application

9. In what aspects has this study reminded you of God's love for his people? Share your observation and thoughts.

10. Most of us would have felt a longing towards someone (or more than one, but not at the same time hopefully) of the opposite sex in our lifetime. From the study tonight, what are the right things to consider when thinking romantically about the opposite sex (whether married or otherwise)? Why are they important?

11. Share one thing about the dynamics of the relationship between the Shulamite and her beloved which you noticed from tonight's study. Why did it capture your attention and how can it be applied in your life?

Study 2: “The Season of Love Is Here” (Song of Songs 2:8 - 3:5)

Getting Started

1. What do you think about the book of Song of Songs thus far? Pray that God would help you in your understanding of His word.

Digging In

Song of Songs 2:8-15

2. From v8-9, what does her beloved do and how is he described?

3. What is her beloved’s intention coming to her? (V10, 13, 14)

4. From the verses below, what do you think the author is trying to describe poetically?

11	for behold, the winter is past; the rain is over and gone.
12	The flowers appear on the earth, the time of singing has come, and the voice of the turtledove is heard in our land.
13	The fig tree ripens its figs, and the vines are in blossom; they give forth fragrance.
15	for our vineyards are in blossom.

5. In light of the question above, what do you think “catch the foxes....” mean in the context of the poem?

Song of Songs 2:16-17

6. The woman responds to her beloved - what do you think she is saying here?

Song of Songs 3:1-5

7. In verses 1-3, how does the woman refer to her beloved in these verses, and what does she do here? What do you think is her state of mind?
8. What did the woman do when she found her beloved? What do you think she was feeling? (V4)
9. What do you think bringing her beloved to her mother's chambers means?
10. "I adjure you...that you not stir up or awaken love until it pleases." (V5) is repeated three times throughout the book of Song of Songs. Discuss the meaning of this verse, and why it is repeated.

Application

8. What does the passage show us about a relationship between the woman and her beloved? How might this help us think about how we conduct ourselves in courtship?
9. In today's study, we see how the woman and her beloved long for and seek one another. How does this compare to God's relationship with His people (us)?

Study 3: “Altogether Beautiful” (Song of Songs 3:6-5:1)

Getting Started

1. What is the view of sex that is prevalent amongst the world, our friends and ourselves? How does this affect us as Christians?

Context

So far we have been following this series on this epic poetry that speaks of passion and romance. As we continue looking on through this series, we have to keep in mind that due to the nature of this being poetry and there is not much guidance on how we are to interpret the message there will be some differences in opinions. However, we can still agree on a framework of interpretation, this is a book of wisdom so God intended for us to learn from this and therefore there are elements of prescriptive description instead of this merely being descriptive and secondly this is also part of God’s inspired word so it does not teach us anything that goes against God’s wisdom to us, will not contradict scripture and we can read other parts of scripture together and work out how the passage fits in together.

2. What have we seen so far in Song of Songs?

Digging In

Song of Songs 3:6-11

3. What is happening here? What does the imagery of this poem seek to show us?
4. What is the thrust of v9-11? How does this relate to what is going on in this poem?
5. What is the imagery here seeking to show us about the idea of weddings? What implication does this picture have for us in thinking through weddings?

6. There are two views about this book, (i) it is written by Songs to celebrate his wedding with the Shulammite or (ii) this is written in the wisdom tradition of Songs about the celebration of the union between the Shulammite and her lover (who is not Songs).

Which view do you feel is more appropriate and why? Do note that it is ok to hold different views as even scholars do so. (*Is the guy she wants to marry Songs or someone else?*)

Song of Songs 4:1-7

7. Try to sketch the beloved based on his description, share with the group. Discuss what is he trying to do here and how you understand it.

8. How do you suppose the woman feels in hearing this? Is this something good to say or bad? Why?

Song of Songs 4:8-11

9. What is the author trying to do here? If you were to explain with your own words and understanding, what is he saying and how does this tie in to v11 in the previous chapter?

10. Read Genesis 2:24 and Song of Songs 4:8. Is there any connection? How does this help us think about the nature of marriage?

Song of Songs 4:11-5:1

11. What does the response by the woman and men mean? How is this a good or bad thing? Discuss.

12. There is a lot of garden imagery in this passage today. Try to identify some of them and discuss what does the Garden of Eden and this poetry about love, sex and marriage have in relation.

Application

13. Knowing that in the New Testament, the relationship between Christ and His church is pictured as a marriage, what does this picture of marriage here inform us about how God sees marriage?
14. How would we then respond to those who cannot get married or do not have the desire to get married? Where can they find satisfaction then? Is there a consolation prize? In the same way, how does that shape how we see the fulfilment of desires in marriage?
15. Knowing that Songs married 700 and had around 300 concubines, what would this song show him?
16. How would we then respond to those who trust in Christ but have lost this opportunity of rightly finding satisfaction in sex within marriage due to their sinfulness in the past, being exposed to culture that speaks against this, being victims of abuse or inability to marry? What words of comfort would you give?

Study 4: “Christ our True Bridegroom Will Never Forsake His Bride” **(Song of Songs 5:2-6:3)**

Getting Started

1. Share with one another what you’ve learnt so far in Song of Songs 1:1-5:1.

Digging In

Song of Songs 5:2-8.

2. Describe what happens to her.
3. Why does she not come to him (5:3)? What do you think she is struggling with?
4. What did it take to turn her heart back to him (5:4-5)?
5. Now that she has overcome her feelings, but what may have already happened (5:6)?
6. What do the watchmen do (5:7)? Compare this with what they did previously (3:3-4)?

She asks the daughters of Jerusalem to take a message to the shepherd. They wonder what is so special about him (5:9).

Song of Songs 5:10-16

7. How does she describe her beloved?

8. What do you think is the significance of her description of him?

Responding to her description of him, the daughters of Jerusalem ask where has he gone (6:1).

Song of Songs 6:2-3

9. What is her response? Where has her beloved gone?

10. Is this a happy or bad ending?

Application

11. How would today's passage apply to the readers back in those days?

12. What is the key takeaway from today's passage for us as God's people?

Study 5: “Growing Intimacy” (Song of Songs 6:4-8:4)

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Study 6: “True Love?” (Song of Songs 8:5-14)

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