

## There Is Power In Praising Your Partner

### Song of Songs 1:9-14

**Introduction:** 1) A number of years ago I read a book that had a profound effect on my life as a husband and a father. The book is called *The Gift of the Blessing* and it was written by Gary Smalley and John Trent. In it they provide both biblical and practical advice on how we can bless rather than curse the relationships of life, how we can build up rather than tear down those we love and care for. When it comes to our mate, their counsel is invaluable. They note, “God has put us together in such a way that we have emotional and physical needs that can only be met by affirmation, acceptance as to intrinsic worth, encouragement, and unconditional love. We all have the desire and need to receive “the blessing” from others. Others include our heavenly Father but it should also include our spouse. Neither is to be excluded if we are to receive true holistic blessings.”

They then point out that the essential elements of the blessings include five things:

- 1) **A meaningful touch** – This includes handholding, hugging, kissing, and all types of bodily contact that has the purpose of communicating love and affection.
- 2) **A spoken word** – This element can demonstrate love and a sense of worth by the time involved, and the message(s) delivered. Its repetitive nature is crucial.

- 3) **Expression of high value** – This involves our passing along a message to others that affirms their intrinsic worth and value as a person. Praising them as valuable is the key idea.
- 4) **Picturing a special future** – This is the uniquely prophetic aspect of the blessing. What do our words tell others we believe the future holds for them? How do our present descriptions (nicknames) of others lay the foundation for future attitudes and actions on their part? How often it is that children, in particular, fulfill the earlier expectations and predictions of a parent and friends, for good or bad. Positive words of encouragement as to future possibilities are those that will bless rather than curse.
- 5) **An active commitment to see the blessing come to pass** – This characteristic is both God-ward and man-ward. Godwardly, we are to commit others to His blessing and will. Manwardly, we are personally to make the commitment to spend whatever time, energy and resources necessary to bless others. (Quoted in *God on Sex*, 25-26).

This list makes it clear that blessing our mate involves both words and actions. It includes what we say and what we do.

2) In Song of Songs 1:9-14, both words and actions are in view, but it is our words that are especially emphasized. Solomon wants us to understand a vitally important truth when it comes to a healthy and growing marriage: **THERE IS**

POWER IN PRAISING YOUR PARTNER. Words matter and they matter a lot. The Roman orator Cicero said, “We are all motivated by a keen desire for praise.” Solomon would agree, and so he puts together two striking poems of admiration. The first (1:9-11) is spoken by the Shepherd-King in praise of his lovely and much valued lady. The second is voiced by the “most beautiful of women” (1:8) to her unique and much desired man (1:12-14). There is tremendous wisdom in these few verses. There are also some very interesting images and metaphors we will need to unpack. Be prepared to laugh and blush!

I. Tell her how valuable she is to you 1:9-11

- 1) There is a shift in scene from verse 8 to verse 9. We move from the simple shepherd’s field to the magnificent world of the Egyptian Pharaoh. Solomon has been sensitive (see Eph. 5:28-29) to Shulamite’s insecurities concerning her appearance (1:5-6) and his absence (1:7). He addressed both of them in verse 8 telling her she is the “most beautiful of women” and also giving her guidance in how she can find him.
- 2) However, and this is important, he did not stop there. He continues to talk with her in verses 9-11 with words of praise that would bring joy to her heart and blessing to her soul. He wants her to know she is the best! There is no girl like his girl! No lady can compare to his lady!

3) As we walk through these verses it is important that we see something that we must not miss. The words and gifts of Solomon are genuine and from the heart. He is not trying to bribe her or buy her. His desire is to bless her and to do so in a way that speaks to her heart. Solomon had learned, or was at least in the process of learning, to speak her “love language.” Gary Chapman, in *The Five Love Languages*, points out that we all speak at least one of these five love languages. Some are even equipped to speak several, and with varying dialects! However, it is rare that a husband and wife speak the same love language. After all, opposites do attract. Dr. Chapman identifies the five love languages as:

- 1) Words of Affirmation
- 2) Receiving Gifts
- 3) Acts of Service
- 4) Quality Time
- 5) Physical Touch

The following verses will leap with personal applications if we will keep this insight in mind. As a couple grows in their knowledge of one another, they will speak and show love to their mate they will hear, understand, appreciate and respond to.

- 1) Tell her there is no one like her                      1:9-10

- 1) Solomon told Shulamite she was the “most beautiful of women” in v. 8. Now he calls her “my darling” (*ESV*, “my love”; *CEB*, “my dearest”), something he will do repeatedly (9 times) throughout the Song (cf. 1:15; 2:2, 10, 13; 4:1, 7; 5:2; 6:4). The word communicates to her his commitment and devotion, his delight and pleasure in her. Her step-brothers may have mistreated her (1:6), but he will honor her both in word and action.
- 2) She is his darling and so he compares her “to a mare among Pharaoh’s chariots.” You have got to be kidding! Is he serious?! Yes he is, and she would have clearly understood the compliment in the cultural context of that day. Pharaoh’s chariot horses would have all been stallions. A mare would have been beautiful, noble, valued and unique in their midst. She would have been a “black beauty” (cf. 1:5) that would have garnered the immediate attention of every stallion in sight! Now we see the compliment. She is like the one or only woman in a world of men, and she is a stunningly beautiful woman at that. She is priceless! No one is like her. She is a choice and valued bride.
- 3) In verse 10 Solomon focuses on certain specifics that cause her to stand out: “Your cheeks are beautiful with jewelry, your neck with its

necklace.” The bridles of Pharaoh’s chariot horses were often adorned with beautiful jewelry and Solomon may still have the image of a stately mare in mind. This man notices the things that enhance her natural beauty, and he tells her what they are. These adornments do not make her beautiful. They complement her beauty. Tom Gledhill suggests, “Her rounded cheeks are enhanced by large circular *ear-rings* which emphasize the roundness of her face. Her neck is decorated by row upon row of strings of brightly colored beads. This enhances her height, her stateliness, as well as giving a slight hint of inaccessibility and protection” (*The Message of the Song of Songs*, BST, 112). In Solomon’s opinion, there is no one like her. No one compares. She has no equal. And, he tells her so! There is power in his praise of his partner.

2) Tell her no cost is too great to honor her 1:11

- 1) No price tag can be put on the one God knits our hearts to (cf. S.S 8:6-7). Solomon will withhold no good thing from the one he loves. He will see to it that she is further honored with gold jewelry accented with silver. The most valued metals are not too good or costly to be showered on her. Richard Hess nails it, “Whatever the cost, he will

honor her. The focus of his love has no limits as to the cost or task that he must undertake to bless her.” (*Song of Songs*, BCOTWP, 67).

2) My friend Matt Carter loves to talk to men about how they can “win” or “win back” the heart of their wife. His counsel is good advice for any man, and it reflects the wisdom of these verses in the Song of Songs.

1) I will tame my tongue. When it comes to my wife, I need to be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to anger.

2) I will talk to my wife the way I would if a special and important person were visiting my home.

3) I will always be upbeat and positive in my interactions with my wife. I am not called to critique her. I am called to love and accept her.

4) I won't use my words to try to *take* from her. I will just give and bless, thinking about what she needs, not what I need.

5) I will strive to serve my wife every day.

6) I will win my wife's heart so she, in turn, will *want* to be mine.

7) Just as divorce is not an option with me, I want that same reality to be true for negativity or harshness with my wife. It is *not* an

option for me to be harsh with my wife. Not under any circumstance. Ever.

8) I will sow seeds of righteousness by consistently committing to walk with the Lord. God will give me the power to bear this fruit and love my wife wholeheartedly (Colt McCoy and Matt Carter, *The Real Win*, 149-50).

3) Treat your wife in this way with your words and actions and she will know that she is valued by you. She will know she has won your heart, and she will be moved to give hers to you in response.

II. Tell him how unique he is to you 1:12-14

1) This woman knows that she is loved and valued by the man in her life. In word and action he has demonstrated his commitment and devotion to her. Now, she returns the compliment without any fear or hesitation. Her confidence in his love for her frees her to love him in return with passion and sensual expressions of that love. The insecurities she felt in verses 5-8 has vanished. They have been vaporized by the love of her Shepherd-King!

2) It is beautiful to watch the two lovers engage in a game of praise! This will go on for quite some time. What a wonderful contest for



any couple to enter! Let's see who can out-praise the other! What a great way to bless and love your mate.

- 3) We must never forget a familiar but important nursery rhyme from the 1800's: "sticks and stones may break my bones but name or words will never hurt me." That rhyme is not true. Words are indeed powerful weapons with the ability to bless or curse, heal or hurt. No wonder God's Word addresses the issue so often, especially in the Proverbs. Note just 10 of many.
- Proverbs 12:18, "There is one who speaks rashly, like a piercing sword; but the tongue of the wise brings healing."
  - Proverbs 13:3, "The one who guards his mouth protects his life; the one who opens his lips invites his own ruin."
  - Proverbs 15:1, "A gentle answer turns away anger, but a harsh word stirs up wrath."
  - Proverbs 15:4, "The tongue that heals is a tree of life, but a devious tongue breaks the spirit."
  - Proverbs 16:24, "Pleasant words are a honeycomb; sweet to the taste and health to the body."
  - Proverbs 18:21, "Life and death are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruit."

- Proverbs 21:23, “The one who guards his mouth and tongue keeps himself out of trouble.”
- Proverbs 27:15, “An endless dripping on a rainy day and a nagging wife are alike.”
- Proverbs 29:20, “Do you see a man who speaks too soon? There is more hope for a fool than for him.”
- Proverbs 31:26, “She [the virtuous wife] opens her mouth with wisdom and loving instruction is on her tongue.”

The woman of our Song is truly a Proverbs 31 lady. Let’s listen in on how she speaks, in wisdom, to her lover.

1) Tell him you desire him 1:12

- 1) Once again Shulamite addresses her lover as “the King.” He is a Shepherd-King, a Bridegroom-King. The king “on his couch” or “at his table” indicates a time of rest and relaxation. It could also suggest the ideas of intimacy and lovemaking as they look forward to their wedding day (3:6-11) and their wedding night (4:1-5:1). She loves him and she wants to make love to him.
- 2) Appealing to his sense of smell, she says “my perfume releases its fragrance.” The word for “perfume” is “spikenard” or simply “nard.” The word is rare. It will occur again in 4:13-14, and also in the

anointing of Jesus for his burial (Mark 14:1-9; John 12:1-8). Nard was an expensive fragrance. Hess informs us, “Pure nard was a fragrance native to the Himalayan region of India....Its scarcity and difficulty of manufacturing and transporting it a long distance made it both valuable and exotic. Perhaps this is the reason it is mentioned only three times in the Old Testament and only in the Song (4:13-14). As the most expensive of the perfumes mentioned, it also had the closest association with the king. Yet the female lover refers to it as “my nard” (Hess, 69). Carr says nard was in “much demand as a ‘love-potion’” (Carr, TOTC, 85).

- 3) Shulamite is sexually aroused and seeks to elicit the same emotions in her man. And, he is her king and he is worthy of a sensual and expensive display of affection. The release of her perfume and its fragrance creates an environment for lovemaking and romance. He is precious to her and much valued. She will hold nothing back.

2) Tell him you love him                      1:13

- 1) Tremper Longman notes, “This verse stretched the imagination of allegorical interpreters with its explicit sensuality. Cyril of

Alexandria is at his creative best when he suggests that the verse describes what we today would call biblical theology. The breasts are the Old and New Testaments, presumably only linked by their twoness. Jesus Christ is the sachet of myrrh. The New Testament is in the Old concealed; the Old in the New revealed. Jesus spans the testaments as the sachet spans the woman's two breasts." (*Song of Songs*, NICOT, 106).

The ancient allegorist did indeed stretch their imaginations with some of their interpretations. However, the woman of our Song had quite an imagination herself, and her love for her man frees her to express it.

- 2) Shulamite says, "My love is a sachet of myrrh to me, spending the night between my breasts." The overtones are both intimate and sexual, picturesque and yet chaste. "Myrrh is a resinous gum gathered from a species of a South Arabian tree....In liquid form it would be carried in small bottles like nard, but it was also used in solid form. This way it could be carried in a small cloth pouch or sachet and worn next to the body....The myrrh was mixed with fat...as the fat melted from the body heat, the aroma of the myrrh...would fill the room." (Carr, 85).

What Shulamite does here is moving. She compares her shepherd-king to this precious sweet-smelling bundle, one that lies all night between her breasts, close to her heart. “Her thoughts of him are as fragrant and refreshing as the perfume that rises before her . . . She carries those fragrant thoughts of him through the night in peaceful sleep.” (S. Craig Glickman, *A Song for Lovers*, 37). Nestled between her breasts against her beating heart, there is an intimate bond of love, longing, and loyalty that cannot be broken. There is a connection, a commitment that virtually transcends words. All night long he layed his head as a precious fragrance between her breasts. She trusted him so completely, she loved him so dearly, she can make available to him the most intimate and precious parts of her body. She holds nothing back. She knows she does not need to.

3) Tell him you need him 1:14

- 1) The woman now compares her man to a luscious and fruitful water garden, an oasis surrounded by desert. They have returned to the Garden of Eden where the damaging effects of the Fall are absent, nowhere in sight (see Gen. 1-2). All is beautiful and fruitful. Death is outside in the desert. There is only life in this paradise for lovers.

- 2) Again Shulamite refers to Solomon as “My love.” Theirs is an exclusive love relationship. He is a one-woman kind of man, and she is a one-man kind of woman. But she says more. He is refreshing, like “a cluster of henna blossoms to me, in the vineyards of En-gedi.” The henna bush can reach a height of ten feet. It has thick yellow and white flowers in clusters and smells like roses. It is a semitropical vegetation, and it grows at the En-gedi Oasis on the western shore of the Dead Sea, south of Jerusalem and just north of Masada. Longman notes, “Hidden and private, it is a romantic place to be sure” (NICOT, 106). The flowers are beautiful to see and sweet to smell and a rare find in a desert’s arid climate.
- 3) The analogy is striking. Solomon is like an oasis with its surprising pleasures and provisions in a desert. He is a rare find and therefore of inestimable value. It is as if the woman is saying, “All I have seen is a desert of men until I met you. You are my oasis with your beauty and fragrance. No man refreshed me until I met you. I dream about you. I think about you. I dream about us. I think about us. You are truly all I need. The very thought of you is a continual source of mental, physical, sensual and spiritual

pleasure. No man can make me feel like you make me feel.” Here is passion that flows from praise. *Passion in the bedroom is always preceded by passion in all the other rooms.* Once again we see, there is power in praising your partner.

### **Practical Applications**

- 1) Abraham Lincoln said, “The success of marriage depends not only on having the right partner, but in being the right partner.” Part of being the right partner is developing the art of praising your partner, loving them with your lips, “wowing” them with your words.
- 2) Steve Stephens says, “A healthy marriage is a safe haven from the tensions of everyday life. We need to hear positive things from our mate.” He then shares 37 things we can and should say to our mate in order to bless, build-up, encourage and “wow” them! I love his list, and how I pray this will be the normal and regular vocabulary of marriages everywhere beginning with mine. They prove beyond a shadow of a doubt, there is power, awesome power, in praising our partner.
 

“Good job!”

“You are wonderful.

“That was really great.”

“You look gorgeous today.”

“I don’t feel complete without you.”

“I appreciate all the things you’ve done for me all these years.”

“You come first in my life, before kids, career, friends, anything.”

“I’m glad I married you.”

“You’re the best friend I have.”

“If I had to do it over again, I’d still marry you.”

“I wanted you today.”

“I missed you today.”

“I couldn’t get you out of my mind today.”

“It’s nice to wake up next to you.”

“I will always love you.”

“I love to see your eyes sparkle when you smile.”

“As always, you look good today.”

“I trust you.”

“I can always count on you.”

“You make me feel good.”

“I’m so proud to be married to you.”

“I’m sorry.”

“I was wrong.”

“What would you like?”



“What is on your mind?”

“Let me just listen.”

“You are so special.”

“I can’t imagine life without you.”

“I wish I were a better partner.”

“What can I do to help?”

“Pray for me.”

“I’m praying for you today.”

“I prize every moment we spend together.”

“Thank you for loving me.”

“Thank you for accepting me.”

“Thank you for being my partner.”

“You make every day brighter.”

Steve Stephens, “37 Thinks to Say to your Spouse,” in *Stories for the Heart*, compiled by Alice Gray (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah, 1996), 177-78.

### **Where is Christ in these verses? The Delights of Knowing My King**

1) In Psalm 45 we discover a royal wedding song that is unique to the psalter.

Its language echoes that of our Song in a number of places. Some even believe it was first written for Solomon and his wedding. Like the King of our Song, this King is praised by others (v. 1) and is the most handsome of

men with grace flowing from his lips (v. 2). He loves righteousness and hates wickedness (v. 7). Myrrh, aloes, and cassia perfume his garments (v. 8) and he desires with passion the beauty of his bride (v. 11). And, concerning this king, God Himself says, “Your throne, God is forever and ever” (v. 6); “I will cause your name to be remembered for all generations; therefore the peoples will praise you forever and ever.” (. 17). Psalm 45 points to the same King that the Song of Songs is pointing. They are one and the same. He is the Messiah-King, the promised King, the One that Hebrews 1:8-9 informs us is Messiah Jesus. Of Psalm 45, Alexander MacLaren said, “Either we have here a piece of poetical exaggeration far beyond the limits of poetic license, or a greater than Solomon is here” (Boice, *Psalms*, vol. 2, p. 381). One greater than Solomon is portrayed in Psalm 45. One greater than Solomon is on display in the Song of Songs as well.

- 2) This great King has beautifully adorned his bride (Song of Songs 1:9-11) for her wedding day (Rev. 21:2), and she along with the Spirit invites all to come and enjoy the pleasures provided by the Bridegroom (Rev.22:17). Whereas He has made her cheeks beautiful with jewelry (1:10), he gave his cheeks “to those who tore out His beard” (Isa 50:6) as our suffering Servant King. All that we lost in the Fall, being banished from the lush water garden

of Eden, we now regain as our lover takes us into the beautiful oasis of Engedi. This King, Shepherd, Bridegroom and Lover is Paradise restored and more! The delights He has for us are greater than we could ever imagine.

- 3) The world in which we live is a desert place indeed. We will never find in it what we need for life. All it offers is thirst, destitution, longing and death. But in Christ our Shepherd-King it is all together different. Here is the water of life, beauty, rest, and everything you will ever need. He is an Oasis of life for all who flee to Him. Won't you come and rest in all he provides? Jesus said, "Come to Me, all of you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest" (Matt 11:28). What He says is true. Come and see!