

## How To Begin A Divine Love Story

### Song of Songs 1:1-4

**Introduction:** 1) The second century rabbi Akiba ben Joseph said, “In the entire world there is nothing to equal the day in which the Song of Songs was given to Israel. All the writings are holy, but the Song of Songs is the holy of holies” (Misnah, Yadim 3:5). The rabbi was talking about a book we find in the Bible called “The Song of Solomon” or “The Song of Songs,” an eight chapter, 117 verse, 2661 word love song.

2) Few books have fascinated humans more than this one. God is never mentioned directly, if at all, in this book (but see 8:6). In this regard it is like the book of Esther. It also is never quoted directly in either the Old or New Testament. Its Latin title is “Canticles” which means “songs.” It was one of the five megilloth (meaning scrolls) read annually by the Hebrew people at Passover (along with Ruth, Esther, Ecclesiastes and Lamentations). It was penned by King Solomon, Israel’s wisest king who reigned from c. 971-931 B.C. over the United Kingdom of Israel and Judah. First Kings 4:32 says that “Solomon composed 3,000 proverbs, and his songs numbered 1,005.” Yet of all the songs he wrote, the Song of Songs was his best.

3) Now, a couple of major questions confront us as we prepare to mine this treasure trove of divine truth. First, how do we interpret this love poem? Second,

how do you explain Solomon as the author of a song that extols marital monogamy and fidelity when 1 Kings 11:3 says, “He had 700 wives and 300 concubines, and they turned his heart away from the Lord.” Let’s take these 2 questions in reverse order. Some believe the book is about Solomon or written to Solomon. On this view he is not the author. It may even be a critique of his sinful decisions in the area of marriage. Others believe Solomon wrote Song of Songs as a young man, his contribution to Proverbs as a middle age man, and Ecclesiastes as an old man. If this is true and is certainly possible, then Song of Songs is historical poetry about his first and truest love. However, I think it more likely that Solomon penned Song of Songs (probably later in life) as the ideal, as a poetic picture of what God intended marriage to be. It could even be a song of confession and repentance for his sins of adultery and polygamy. If this is true, then the song looks back to Genesis 1-2 and the beautiful love, harmony and joy Adam and Eve experienced before sin entered the world (Gen. 3) and messed everything up. And, it also anticipates the redeemed marriage relationship depicted in Ephesians 5:21-33. Douglas O’Donnell sums up well what I think is going on, “the song is a song that Adam could have sung in the garden when Eve arose miraculously from his side; and it remains a song that we can and should sing in the bedroom, the church and the marketplace of ideas” (Preaching the Word, 2012, p. 20). This, I believe, helps us answer the interpretive question.

4) Song of Songs is not a random collection of Syria, Egyptian or Canaanite cultic liturgies. It is not a drama with various acts or scenes, attractive as this view is. Nor is it an anthology of disconnected songs praising the bliss of human sexual love between a man and woman. There is unity and even progression in the Song too obvious to ignore. No, it is best understood as a theological and lyrical masterpiece that shows us what marriage ought to be. However, and this is important, we must not stop with the natural reading of the text. We should complete the interpretive process and recognize as poetry, the song was intended to evoke multiple emotions, feelings, and understandings. By way of analogy, it is easy to see how the bride and bridegroom in this Song portrays to us God and Israel, Christ and His Church, the Savior and His people. Jim Hamilton point us in a good direction when he says, “the Song is about Israel’s shepherd King, a descendant of David, who is treated as an ideal Israelite enjoying an ideal bride in a lush garden where the effects of the fall are reversed” (*WTJ*, 2006, 331). And Dennis Kinlaw fleshes out even more fully where God, the divine author of the Bible, intended to take us, “The use of the marriage metaphor to describe the relationship of God to his people is almost universal in Scripture. From the time that God chose Israel to be his own in the Sinai Desert, the covenant was pictured in terms of a marriage. Idolatry was equated with adultery (Exod 34:10-17). Yahweh is a jealous God. Monogamous marriage is the norm for depicting the

covenant relationship throughout Scripture, climaxing with the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. God has chosen a bride. [However], we tend to review the covenant-marriage relationship as an example of how human, created, historical realities can be used analogically to explain eternal truths. Thus human marriage is the original referent, and the union of God with his people is seen as the union of a loving husband and wife....In reality there is much in Scripture to suggest that we should reverse this line of thought. Otherwise the union of Christ with his bride is a good copy of a bad original. The reality is, as Bromiley insists, that earthly marriage, as it is now lived, is “a bad copy of a good original” (p. 77). The original referent is not human marriage. It is God’s elect love, first to Israel and then to the church. If divine love is the pattern for marriage, then there must be something pedagogical and eschatological about marriage. It is an earthly institution that in itself images something greater than itself” (*EBC*, p. 1208).

Kinlaw is right. This earthly institution and this Song point us to a Bridegroom-King whose name is Jesus, a bridegroom who “loved the church [His bride] and gave Himself for her” (Eph. 5:25). This should not surprise us. The Song of Songs is Messianic and Christological. After all Jesus Himself said of the Scriptures in John 5:39, “they testify about Me.” This, then, would include the Song of Songs. It anticipates the joys of salvation realized when we enter the chambers of redemption provided by this King (1:4).

5) So, as we walk thru this carefully crafted love poem, we will see how it addresses the gift of marriage as it was intended by our great God. We will raise points of practical application so that we might more perfectly put into practice what we learn. But then we will conclude each study by asking, what do I see, feel, hear and glean about my King, the Lord Jesus, from this text? This promises to be an exciting, instructive and worshipful journey to be sure.

I. Being passionate for your mate is a good thing 1:1-3

- 1) Bernard of Clairvaux said of this song, “it is not a melody that resounds abroad but [is] the very music of the heart; not a trilling on the lips but an inward pulsing of delight; a harmony not of voices but of wills. It is a tune you will not hear in the streets; these notes do not sound where crowds assemble; only the singer hears it and the one to whom he sings – the lover and the beloved” (Sermon 1, quoted in *Song of Songs*, Griffiths, Brazos Theo. Comm, xxi).
- 2) Sex, marital intimacy, is a good gift from a great God. He is the one who came up with this fantastic idea and I think He was having a really good day when He did! In other words God is pro-sex when we engage in the act as He designed it and we do it for His glory. Yes, the glory of God should be the goal of sex, the goal of marriage. John Piper is exactly right, “The ultimate thing to see in the Bible about marriage is that it exists for God’s

glory. Most foundationally, marriage is the doing of God. Most ultimately, marriage is the display of God. It is designed by God to display his glory in a way that no other event or institution does” (*This Momentary Marriage*, p. 24). One of the ways we display God’s glory in marriage is by being passionate for our mate. This honors one of God’s designs in marriage. Perhaps that is why Solomon called this his “finest song,” the best of the best.

1) What do you feel about them? 1:1-3

1) Following the title, the woman speaks asking that her king (v. 4) would shower her with passionate kisses, “Oh that he will kiss me with the kisses of his mouth!” Interestingly, the bride, whom we could call Shulammitte (the feminine form of Solomon, cf. 6:13), does the majority of the speaking in this Song (53% to the man’s 34%). Indeed, she has the first and the last word. This stands in contrast to another book of wisdom, the book of Proverbs. I like the perspective of O’Donnell who says, “The book of Proverbs can be called “a book for boys.” The word “son” is used over forty times; the word “daughter” is never used. “My son, stay away from that kind of girl, and don’t marry this kind of girl. But marry and save yourself for that girl- Proverbs 31:10-31.” That’s how the book ends, quite intentionally, for Proverbs is a book for boys. The Song of Songs is a book for girls. And its message to girls is, “patience then passion” or “uncompromised purity now;

unquenchable passion then.” I’ll put it this way: In proverbs the young lad is told to take a cold shower. In the Song of Songs the young lassie is told to take a cold shower.” (p. 24).

2) Why is the young lady so drawn to this man? First, because his love is intoxicating, it “is more delightful than wine.” His passionate and affectionate kisses are sweet and powerful. “They sweep me off my feet. They set my head to spinning and my heart racing” she would say. I have read that, “The passionate kiss (average length one minute) reveals a lot about your relationship. Considered even more intimate than sex, passionate smooching is one of the first things to go when spouses aren’t getting along” (*God on Sex*, p. 12).

3) Her delight is not just in his kisses (touch and taste), they are also in his fragrances (smell), “The fragrance of your perfume is intoxicating” (v. 3). He taste good and he smells good. Being extremely practical for a moment, we can say he brushed his teeth and used mouthwash. He took a bath (or shower!) and used soap (or body wash!). He then put on his best cologne with “anointing oils” (*ESV*), “aromatic oils” (*The Message*). She feels good about this man because he takes the necessary time and steps to make himself attractive to her. He does not take her for granted. He pleases her and he

pleasures her. He sets her free to be the aggressor, something many cultures seem to shy away from, but not the Holy Bible.

4) It is clear she feels like there is no man like this man. There is no king like this king. There is nothing wrong and everything right in what she feels. Her desires are not dirty. Sex is never sinful when it takes place God's way and for God's glory. In that context, she will wait until the time is right (see 2:7; 3:5; 8:4). He is worth waiting for and so is she! First Corinthians 6:19-20 reminds us, "Don't you know that your body is a sanctuary of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought at a price. Therefore glorify God in your body." Our bodies are sacred gifts from God that have been redeemed by the precious blood of Christ, our divine Bridegroom. They are gifts to be used. They are gifts to be treated with care. This is what this bride believes and how she feels about her groom.

2) What do others say about them? 1:3

1) This Bridegroom-King's kisses are better than choice wine. His smells are exhilarating, even intoxicating. His fame and reputation are without question and widely known. "Your name is perfume poured out" speaks to his character as a person. He is like an anointed king, he is the anointed King, who is adored by the young women.

2) A person is always more, much more, than mere physical appearance.

Wise people, when dating or courting, will not just form an opinion or make a judgment of the person they are involved with. No, they will also seek out and listen to the counsel of family and friends. They will listen to public opinion. Is he honest? Does she possess a Christlike spirit that is gentle and quiet (1 Pet 3:4)? Does he have a bad temper? Is she financially responsible? Is he a flirt? A playboy? Does she accept her God-given assignment to submit to and respect her husband (Eph. 5:21-24, 33)? Does he take joy in loving her sacrificially (Eph. 5:25ff) and working hard to understand her (1 Pet 3:7)?

3) We should carefully consider what others say about the person we date, the person we would consider marrying. We all have blind spots. Love can indeed be blind. We must not let our emotions override good decision making, even if it hurts. Shulammite knew this man was respected. He was known as a person of character and integrity. She was not only physically attracted to him; she could respect him. She could admire him.

## II. Desiring intimacy with your mate is a good thing 1:4

The Bible knows nothing of casual sex because in reality, there is no such thing. What is often called casual sex is always costly sex. Sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), unexpected pregnancy, and psychological and spiritual scars are just some of the results. The price many pay is high, because we have approached God's good gift of sex all too casually. Sexual attraction is inevitable. It is what God intended. However, unless we follow God's plan, we will miss out on His best and suffer the painful and tragic consequences of sin in the process.

The Song of Songs explains the purpose and place of sex as God designed it. When we make love the way God planned, we enjoy the security of a committed relationship, experience the joy of unreserved passion, and discover the courage to give ourselves completely to another in unhindered abandonment.

Sociologists and marriage and family counselors are now discovering that the most emotionally and physically satisfying sex is between committed partners, and that satisfaction from sex increases with sexual exclusivity (one partner only), emotional investment in the relationship, and a lasting horizon for the marriage. They are also discovering that marriage is an excellent tonic for both mental and physical health, and that marriage is far superior to cohabitation in

both areas. (Marilyn Elias, “Marriage Makes for a Good State of Mind,” *USA Today*, 14 Aug. 2000. Quote in *God on Sex*, p. 3-4).

1) Do you enjoy spending time with them?

- 1) The woman longs to be alone with her man and so she excitedly exclaims, “Take me with you – let us hurry.” And, where does she want to go? “May the King bring me into his chambers” (my translation). She loves being with this man and she is in a hurry to be with him in private; in the bedroom. She can freely give herself to him in this way because of the man, the King, he is! She wants to be alone and she has “no fear!”
- 2) How do we get to this place in courting? In marriage? While there are a number of ways to get at this question I found the following list especially helpful:
  - 1) Take one another seriously, (but not too seriously).
  - 2) Nurture one another. (Eph. 5:29-30).
  - 3) Set up a problem-solving strategy.
  - 4) Be respectful and courteous at all times. Treat your mate like a good friend.
  - 5) Spend time with your spouse. (Both quality and quantity).
  - 6) Make room for intimacy and affection without pushing always for sex.

- 7) Treat one another as equals, because you are.
- 8) Be honest with one another; always speak the truth in love. (Eph. 4:15).
- 9) Give your spouse practical and relational priority in all aspects of your life.
- 10) Be slow to anger, slow to speak, and quick to listen. (James 1:19).
- 11) Do not let the sun go down on your anger. (Eph. 4:29)
- 12) Never stop caring about pleasing your spouse. (Phil. 2:3-4)
- 13) Seek unity and do not feel threatened by disagreement. (Phil. 2:2)
- 14) Honor one another's rights and needs.
- 15) Do not impose your will on the other. Be peaceful and kind and use persuasion, not coercion.
- 16) Seek to be one another's best friend.
- 17) Try to deal with facts rather than feelings.
- 18) Minister to rather than manipulate one another.
- 19) Put your spouse before all others including the children, except for Christ.
- 20) Honor God's structure for marriage. (Eph. 5:21-33)
- 21) Be approachable, teachable, and correctable (even by and especially by your spouse).

- 22) Do not try to control everything. Give room for your mate to honestly express their feelings.
  - 23) Confront one another with tenderness, compassion, and loving concern, working hard not to frustrate them.
  - 24) Be willing to sacrifice for your loved ones.
  - 25) Do not neglect your responsibility to provide for your mate.
  - 26) Again, be willing to communicate and to listen!
  - 27) Despise divorce and determine it will never be an option.
  - 28) Eat as many meals with one another as possible.
  - 29) Whenever possible, postpone doing things you want to do for yourself to the times when your spouse is busy with other things.
  - 30) Do not stop trying to make time for your spouse just because it seems so impossible to do so.
- 2) Do you value them for who they are?

- 1) In the latter half of verse 4 a group of female singers show up, the daughters of Jerusalem (see v. 5). They have heard the words of Shulammitte concerning the King and they wish to reinforce her opinion of this man. Their love merits praise and rejoicing. Because you so value this man, we value him too. More than that, we value who you are together! You prove the truth of Genesis 2:18, “Then the Lord God said,

“It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper as his complement.” Such beautiful complementarity evokes rejoicing and gladness. It calls for praise of such a pure and precious love that is better than the choicest wine.

2) It is a blessing to read this book and to see something really important.

Not only does this couple love each other, they also like each other.

They not only want each other, they also delight in bragging on each other.

When asked how you could tell if two people are married, an 8 year old boy named Derek said, “Married people usually look happy to talk to other people.” This is sad, but it is often true. A stroll through the Song of Songs reveals something altogether different. Here are two people who are happiest when they are talking to each other! They are aware that they are sinners saved by God’s grace. But saved they are, and now they are part of a story written in heaven by a divine cosmic romantist. Our Lord loves a good love story. Song of Songs says it is so. Golgotha’s cross says it even louder!

#### Practical applications from Song of Songs 1:1-4

1) The Song of Songs begins with expressions of love, desire, passion and longing for intimacy. It also addresses issues of character and reputation. Let’s set forth some True/False questions to explore our perspective on these issues.

Our goal, as always, is to have the mind of Christ (Phil 2:5), to think God's thoughts after Him. Take the test with your boyfriend or girlfriend if you are not married, with your mate if you are. After answering each question, talk over your answers. Work hard at listening and understanding. Look for biblical guidance and insight as you proceed.

T or F 1) Sexual desire and passion for the opposite sex is a good, natural and God-given desire.

T or F 2) The Bible frowns on any type of intoxication, including being intoxicated with passion for your mate.

T or F 3) When it comes to intimacy in marriage, it is wise to involve all 5 senses in the process (i.e. touch, taste, sound, smells, and sight).

T or F 4) You should pay little or no attention to the opinion of family or friends when choosing a mate. It is your decision.

T or F 5) A happy honeymoon probably guarantees a happy and lasting marriage.

T or F 6) Children are essential to a happy and fulfilling marriage.

T or F 7) Sex is only for the young not the old.

T or F 8) Growing in friendship with your mate is a key to growing in your intimacy with them.

T or F 9) Being a student of marriage is a key to growing in my marriage.

T or F 10) Being a student of my mate is a key to growing in my marriage.

T or F 11) There is wisdom in knowing the difference between my needs and my wants.

T or F 12) It is not essential, even necessary, to praise your mate in public.

T or F 13) I am honestly intoxicated with my love for Jesus.

T or F 14) Who Jesus is and what He has done for me (His Name) strengthens and sustains me day by day.

T or F 15) I long to be with Jesus in the intimate and private place where I can simply enjoy His presence.

Where is Christ in these verses? Have a passion for your King!

- 1) “Solomon’s Finest Song” is literally Solomon’s “Song of Songs.” It is a superlative like “holy of holies,” “vanity of vanities,” “King of Kings” or “Lord of Lords.” And yet in the best song ever there is no mention, at least directly, of God. Is there any way to make sense of this? David Hubbard provides a helping hand I believe when he writes, “God’s name is absent from the entire setting. But who would deny that his presence is strongly felt? From whom come such purity and passion? Whose creative touch can ignite hearts and bodies with such a capacity to bring unsullied delight to another? Who kindled the senses that savor every sight, touch, scent, taste, and sound of a loved one? Whose very character is comprised of the love

that is the central subject of the Song? None of this is to allegorize either the minute details or the main sense of the book. It is about human love at its best. But behind it, above it, and through it, the Song, as part of the divinely ordered repertoire of Scripture, is a paean of praise to the Lord of creation who makes possible such exquisite love and to the Lord of redemption who demonstrated loves' fullness on a cross" (*Communicator's Comm.*, 273-74).

- 2) The word "king" appears throughout the Song of Songs. He is the one the bride wants to be alone with while the crowds praise him (1:4). He is the one she wishes to please (1:12) and also be on public display with as she celebrates her marriage to him (3:9, 11). He is her king, the one she longs to captivate with her attractiveness and beauty (7:5). This king is like no other. He restores what was lost in the garden (Gen.3) and He points to a wedding day and a marriage that only eternity will realize (Rev. 19:7-10, 21:1-2). No wonder the bride loves Him so.
- 3) Just as we rightly long for and have passions for our spouse, we should desire with even greater fervency this Bridegroom-King whose attractiveness is indescribable, whose Name is above every name (Phil 2:9-11), and who is truly the desire of all nations (Haggai 2:7). Marriage was always intended to point to Christ and His Church. The Song of Songs

places this truth front and center for our gaze and meditation. And what will we see? I think it will be this, “the Song’s words resonate within the verbal manifold of scripture’s corpus, and when you pay attention to those resonances you see, beyond reasonable dispute, that the depiction of human memory, desire, and sexual love in the Song figures both the Lord’s love for you and yours for him, and does so in a way that helps us to see that our human loves for one another are what they are because of their participation in his for us and ours, reciprocally, for him. (Paul Griffiths, Brazos, p. 11).