

The Power Of Praising Your Partner

Song of Solomon 1:9-14

I. Be specific in your praise. 1:9-10

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1. Be specific.
2. Be sincere.

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(Tell him he is worthy of an expensive display.)
2. Desire is made known by loyalty. 1:13
(Tell him he is a fragrance close to your heart.) 1:13
3. Desire is made known by longing. 1:14
(Tell him he is refreshing like an oasis in a desert.)

- Spikenard expresses his great worth and priceless significance.
- Myrrh expresses her desire for loyal intimacy and fragrant pleasure.
- Henna blossoms expresses his unique and refreshing pleasure.

“The Power of Praising
Your Partner”
(Song of Solomon 1:9-14)

In their outstanding book, *The Gift of the Blessing*, Gary Smalley and John Trent give us some biblical and practical tips on how we can bless rather than curse those we love. When it comes to marriage and our mate, their counsel is crucial and invaluable. They write,

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.

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 have 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. 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 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 which 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.¹

When I examine Gary and John’s list I discover that blessing others involves both what I say and what I do. Words are important. Actions matter. Further, what I say and do cannot be occasional. They must be constant. They also must be specific, sacrificial and even sensual. Now you might ask, where did you get

¹ Gary Smalley and John Trent, *The Gift of the Blessing* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1993).

these ideas, especially the last one? I'm glad you asked. The answer is found in Song of Solomon 1:9-14 where Solomon tells us, "there is power in praising your partner." Here we see important and essential aspects of how to praise, how to bless our partner.

I. Be specific in your praise. 1:9-10

Verse nine shifts the scene from the simple world of the shepherd to the splendid world of the Egyptian Pharaoh. Solomon is aware of Shulamith's ambivalence and insecurity about her appearance and his absence (vs. 5-8). His spousal antenna is active and it is picking up signals. She needs him to bless her, to affirm her, to tell her she's the best. That is exactly what he does.

1. Tell her she is special. 1:9

Solomon begins by calling her "my love" (the NIV has "my darling"). This is the first, but not the last time Solomon will address her in this way (cf. 1:15, 2:2, 10, 13; 4:1, 7; 5:2; 6:4). Repeatedly, again and again (nine times!), Solomon tells her of his love. Unlike her brothers who hurt her in verse six, Solomon will treat her with TLC. He will be her provider and protector, her lover and friend. She is his love.

Solomon then does something that, if a man in America were to do this in our day, he would probably find himself in a hole from which he would never extricate himself. He compares his lover to a horse! Specifically, he says "you are like a filly among Pharaoh's chariots." We are horrified by such a statement. She, however, would have been greatly honored. Pharaoh's chariots were pulled by stallions. A filly in their midst would have caused quite a commotion. She is likened to an only female in a world of males! What incredible value. She is in his estimate utterly priceless. She is desired not just by him, but also by others. Yet, he is the fortunate one who has captured her heart. She is unique, she is special.

2. Tell her she is beautiful. 1:10

Solomon now focuses on one of the areas of her insecurity: her looks. Her "cheeks" are lovely, beautiful. They are enhanced with the dangling earrings, the ornaments and jewelry that grace them. Her "neck" is also beautiful with chains or strings of jewels. She is regal and impressive. A stately dignity emanates from her person. The bridles of chariot horses were often decorated in beautiful and elaborate jewelry and Solomon may still have the image of the lovely filly in mind. However, by now it is in the back of his mind as he gazes upon the beauty of his love. Her adornments do not detract but enhance her appearance. Solomon is not looking at some "over-

dressed glittering Christmas tree.”² There is nothing extravagant or excessive about her. A simple beauty is perhaps the best beauty. In Solomon’s opinion, she has no equal and he tells her so.

Words are powerful weapons. “Sticks and stones may break my bones but names or words can never hurt me” is not true. I have a scar over my eye where my cousin hit me in the eye with a baseball bat when I was a small boy. I have another scar on my right ear where my brother body slammed me on a marble coffee table one day when we were wrestling. Mom of course was gone somewhere, thank goodness. And I have yet another scar right under my chin where a friend (I think!) rammed his football helmet while we played “bull-in-the-ring” before a big game one Friday night. Now let me tell you, all three of those events inflicted serious pain on my person. They hurt! However, none of the three wounded me as badly as have some words that have been fired at me at different times in my life.

Steve Stephens reminds us, “A healthy marriage is a safe haven from the tensions of everyday life. We need to hear positive things from our mate.” He then lists 37 things we should say to our spouse. Any spouse will be blessed by the following:

“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.”

² Motyer, 113.

“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.”

Be particular in your praise. It will speak to your mate’s heart and create an environment of romance which is essential for building the intimate aspects of a relationship.

- II. Be sacrificial in your praise. 1:11
 Solomon’s praise of Shulamith inspires the praise of others. What we publicly say about our mate will often influence the opinion of others about them. Solomon has told her she is special and beautiful. She is the best. She deserves the best, but not just in words, but also in action. When a man wants to be a blessing to his wife, here are two things he should always remember:

1. Be specific.

Ornaments of gold studded with silver are now presented to Shulamith. Motyer in his free paraphrase says, “We’ll crown you with more royalty, O maiden queen, with costly gems, with rings of golden sheen and sparkling spikes of silver.”³ Socrates said, “by all means marry. If you get a good wife, you’ll become happy. If you get a bad one, you’ll become a philosopher.”⁴ I am convinced that the issue is not so much a man “getting” a good wife as it is a man “gaining” a good wife by the way he loves her, by the way he cares for her. Women love specific and creative ideas. A man who invites his wife out on a date only to tell her it doesn’t matter where we go or what we do doesn’t know women. Love is specific. Praise is specific. Judy Bodner in her book, *When Love Dies: How to Save a Hopeless Marriage* drops a few hints to help husbands out: 1) Leave notes and love letters around; 2) Plan detailed getaways; 3) Set aside time alone just for the two of you; 4) Share your feelings with each other; 5)

³ Motyer, 66.

⁴ Quoted in *Leadership*, Fall 1997, p. 79.

Make sexual intimacy attractive by creating a bedroom that is inviting and pleasant, a place of beauty.

2. Be sincere.

The 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 his wonderful book, *The Five Love Languages*, points out that every person speaks at least one of five languages. Some are even equipped to speak several. However, it is rare that a husband and wife speak the same love language. After all, opposites do attract. Gary identifies the five love languages as:

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

In our marriage it is clear that Charlotte and I have two love languages each. Not surprising, they are distinctively different. Hers are Receiving Gifts and Quality Time. Mine are Words of Affirmation and Physical Touch. I always strike a cord in Charlotte’s heart if I bring her a gift. Cost is never a factor; it truly is the thought that counts. When I block off time for the two of us, she always responds in a positive and receptive manner. I’ve often wondered if her love languages are somehow related to her childhood and teenage years. You see, Charlotte’s parents were alcoholics and they divorced when she was a little girl. She has told me that she had some pretty unspectacular birthdays and Christmases. At about the age of nine, she and her brother and sister were placed in a Children’s Home where she spent the next ten years of her life. She really never saw either her mom or dad during those years except for a couple of times early on. Time spent with family and the receiving of gifts from the same just wasn’t there. I’m certain this may have, at least in some measure, shaped her two love languages. Let me add before I move on that one wonderful thing did happen to Charlotte while she was in the Children’s Home. She received Jesus Christ as her personal Lord and Savior, and God became her perfect heavenly Father. Since then He has been molding and shaping her into the beautiful godly woman, wife and mother she is today.

My love languages are all together different from her. I love it when she praises me, when she affirms me with her words. It means the

world to me. I also love her touch and in lots of ways and places! One in particular is especially needful: my feet. I love to have my feet rubbed. When I get to heaven, I have already put in a request for two angels: one to rub and massage the left foot and one to rub and massage the right foot. I remember one evening Charlotte asked me to watch a movie with her (Time) called “Sense and Sensibilities.” What a dumb title for a movie. It was clear to me from the start that this would not be an action-packed thriller. I quickly began to offer my best excuses as to why I just couldn’t “waste,” I mean give up that much time. To my amazement she didn’t argue with me. As she said “O.K.” and walked away, she casually said, “I understand. I’m sorry you will miss out on the two hour foot massage that accompanies the popcorn and the movie.” I had only one response to that, “What time does the movie start?!” A couple that grows in its knowledge of one another will learn to speak the love language not of themselves, but of their mate. They will do it specifically, and they will do it sincerely.

III. Be sensual in your praise. 1:12-14

Shulamith is moved to respond to the loving overtures of Solomon. Her insecurities have vanished. Her anxieties have been put to rest by his words and actions of love. She now returns the favor. What we see is the two of them trying to out do the other in loving the other. This will continue for several verses. What a wonderful contest in which a couple competes against one another. Let the games begin! Shulamith has strong desires for her man. They are personal, physical and sensual. They are particular and passionate. Mikal Frasier says, “Marriage can bring out the worst in us and it can bring out the best in us. The difference is in acting with intentionality.” How do we, with intentionality, make our desires, our feelings, known to our mate?

1. Desire is made known by love. 1:12 (Tell him he is worthy of an expensive display)

Again the man is addressed as a “king,” as royalty. Sitting “at his table” indicates a time of rest and relaxation. Men have as a basic need “home support and serenity.” Shulamith knows what her man needs and she provides it. “Spikenard” was an expensive perfume “derived from a plant native to the Himalayan region of India. The scarcity, and hence the value, of this exotic fragrance made it much in demand as a “love-potion.”⁵ Appealing to his self worth and sense of smell, Shulamith who is herself aroused, seeks to elicit the same from her man. He is her king and worthy of a sensual and expensive display of affection. One can only imagine his response.

2. Desire is made known by loyalty. 1:13

⁵ Carr, 84-85.

(Tell him he is a fragrance close to your heart.)

In genuinely erotic tones the woman says her beloved is “a bundle (sachet) of myrrh... that lies all night between my breasts.” “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.”⁶ Shulamith compares Solomon to this precious, sweet smelling bundle 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.”⁷ 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. In an article entitled “The Danger of Divorce” Norman Bales says, “Perhaps the strongest deterrent to divorce is commitment. Every marriage will be tested at some point. What’s the difference between those who survive the test and those who don’t? Commitment tops the list.”⁸ There was a commitment, a loyalty between Shulamith and Solomon. All night he lay as a precious perfume between her breasts, close to her heart.

3. Desire is made known by longing. 1:14
(Tell him he is refreshing like an oasis in a desert.)

Again, Shulamith refers to Solomon as “my beloved,” her lover. 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 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. A semi-tropical vegetation, it grows at the En Gedi Oasis on the western shore of the Dead Sea, south of Jerusalem. They are beautiful to see and sweet to smell and a very rare find in a desert arid climate. 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.” Unbelievable is

⁶ Ibid., 85.

⁷ S. Craig Glickman, *A Song for Lovers* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1976), 37.

⁸ Norman Bales, *All About Families Newsletter*, 7-26-00.

it not, the passion that flows from a little praise. Passion in the bedroom is preceded by passion in all the other rooms. There is power in praising your partner.

Conclusion

Tommy Nelson well says, “Kindness is a mark of respect. Respect is necessary for romance.”⁹ We have seen a couple sensitive to the needs of the other. We have seen a couple determined to bless the other. We have seen a couple learning to speak one another’s love language. What we have seen is wonderful. What we have seen can be our experience as well when we do romance God’s way.

⁹ Tommy Nelson, *The Book of Romance* (Nashville: Nelson, 1998), 26.