

Session 1 Introduction to Studying the Song: Why and How?

For *additional study material pertaining to this session, see mikebickle.org

I. WHY STUDY THE SONG OF SOLOMON?

- A. One of the greatest needs in the Church today is to understand Jesus' love. Leaders throughout church history have encouraged people to read the Song. (See *additional study material.)

*“Has He ever said to you, whispered to you, ‘My Beloved is Mine?’” **Read the Song of Solomon and see how the Bridegroom expresses His feeling to his Bride, His love.** How lightly we skip over these great statements so that we may argue about our pet ideas and theories! In one sense the whole object of being a Christian is that you may know the love of Jesus Christ, His personal love to you; that He may tell you in unmistakable language that He loves you, that He has given Himself for you, that He has loved you with ‘an everlasting love’. He does this through the Holy Spirit . . . What do we know of these secret intimations? Read the lives of the saints throughout the centuries and you will find that they all know about this. They have known Him to come to them and speak to them, and love them, and tell them that He loves them. He embraces them and surrounds them, and lets them know, more certainly than they know anything else, that He loves them with all the intensity of His divine Being. It is because we are married to Him that He does this.” (From Martyn Lloyd-Jones’ commentary on Romans 7:4)*

- B. I highlight two distinctives that are emphasized in the Song: God’s emotions for His people and the First Commandment. By being students of God’s emotions, we will see more of God’s love.
1. **God’s emotions:** By seeing God’s love, delight, desire, and enjoyment of His people, we are empowered to love God with all of our heart (1 Jn. 4:19). The Song emphasizes the emotional side of God’s personality and His relationship with His people.
 2. **First commandment:** God’s first priority for His people is that they love Him with all of their heart. One purpose in studying the Song is to position ourselves to receive a greater impartation of the Father’s love for Jesus (Jn. 17:26).
*²“**I have declared to them Your [the Father’s] name, and will declare it, that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them.**” (Jn. 17:26)*
- C. The Song sets forth in a poetic way some key principles that we need to grow in love and partnership with Jesus. It gives us insight into how God’s people are to grow in passion for Jesus. Understanding this Song equips us to discern what God is doing in the different seasons of our lives. People often find themselves in two different seasons of this Song at the same time.
- D. The end-time church must be equipped with the revelation of God’s love and beauty to walk in victory in the midst of the most emotionally wounded and sexually broken generation in history.
- E. The Lord spoke to me in July 1988 while I was reading Song 8:6 and praying, “Let Jesus seal my heart with the seal of His love.” The Lord said He would release grace to the Body of Christ worldwide to walk in Song 8:6-7; this speaks of walking out the first commandment in our life.

II. INTERPRETING THE SONG OF SOLOMON

- A. **Natural interpretation:** This view depicts a love story between King Solomon and his bride, a Shulamite maiden. It sets forth principles that honor the beauty of love within marriage. We take the Song at face value where Solomon mentions his courtship and the various stages of his marriage.
- B. **Spiritual interpretation:** This view employs a symbolic interpretation of the Song to emphasize the Lord's relationship with His people as the Bridegroom King. The typological approach to the Song recognizes the OT historical events in Solomon's life and marriage, while celebrating Jesus' love for His Bride, the Church, in the NT. I will use this approach in our study of the Song, so that we may grow in understanding of the relationship between Jesus and the individual believer. This has been the most common interpretation of the Song for the last 3,000 years.
- C. Allegorical and typological interpretations can be helpful if used to illustrate truths that are clearly established throughout the New Testament. See mikebickle.org for my article "*Avoiding the Dangers of Allegorical Interpretation.*"
1. An allegory is a fictional story with symbolic meaning, not based on historical facts. It is a literary form in which truths are presented through symbols. Paul on occasion gave an allegorical interpretation of an Old Testament passage (1 Cor. 9:9-10; 10:4; Gal. 4:24-26; Eph. 5:32).
 2. The typological approach to Scripture honors the historical situation set forth in a passage and then makes a spiritual application.
 3. The majority of commentaries throughout church history have interpreted the Song as a typological or allegorical portrayal of the relationship between Jesus and the Church.
- D. I strongly encourage the use of the historical-grammatical interpretation of Scripture, which is to seek to understand a biblical passage in its plain meaning by taking it at its face value. We are to understand its historical context and see how its author intended it to be understood.
- E. Each book of the Bible was given by the inspiration of the Spirit (2 Tim. 3:16). He exalts Jesus in all that He does. He has a fierce loyalty to fill people with love for Jesus. It seems improbable that the Spirit would inspire a book in the Bible that would not ultimately magnify Jesus.
- ¹⁴***"He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you."* (Jn. 16:14)**
- F. We must refuse all sensual overtones in interpreting the Song of Solomon allegorically, and in our understanding of the Bride of Christ message. Jesus is not our "lover" or "boyfriend."
- G. Jesus spoke of Himself to the disciples on the Emmaus road from all the Scriptures.
- ²⁷***He expounded...in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.* (Lk. 24:27)**
- H. God's Word lasts forever, and earthly marriage does not continue in the resurrection (Mt. 22:30). The redeemed will forever read all of God's Word. Thus, I do not believe that the themes related to natural marriage can exhaust the eternal message and scope of this part of the Scriptures.

- I. Paul described believers as betrothed, or “engaged,” to Jesus in this age (2 Cor. 11:2). The “consummation” of the marriage is in the age to come when we see Him face to face.
²For I have betrothed you to one husband that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. (2 Cor. 11:2)
- J. Jesus is returning for a Church established in her Bridal identity before Him (Rev. 22:17).
¹⁷And the Spirit and the bride say, “Come!”...²⁰He who testifies to these things says, “Surely I am coming quickly.” Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus! (Rev. 22:17-20)
- K. The essence of the message of the Bride of Christ is the revelation of Jesus’ beauty, His emotions for us, His commitments to share His heart, throne, secrets, and beauty with us as our Bridegroom King, and our response of wholehearted love and obedience to Him.
- L. Some see the Bride of Christ as only consisting of those who walked in mature love in this age. In the resurrection, I believe that the Bride includes the *entire Church* from all history. The Spirit will bring God’s work to completion in every believer (Phil. 1:6). I see the Bride of Christ as including all believers, since they will all eventually be perfected in love, in the resurrection.

III. THE MAIN CHARACTERS IN THE SONG

- A. **King Solomon:** In the spiritual interpretation, King Solomon is a picture of the triumphant Christ as the Bridegroom King who possesses all power, yet is filled with affection for His people.
- B. **Shulamite maiden:** In the spiritual interpretation, the Shulamite is a picture of the Bride of Christ. She is introduced as a maiden who grows up to become the Bride who enjoys mature partnership with Jesus. She is mentioned once by her name (6:13), which is derived from the city of Shunem.
- C. **Daughters of Jerusalem:** In the spiritual interpretation, they speak of sincere yet spiritually immature believers. They look to the Shulamite for answers on how to grow close to the King. They are not an actual group that we can identify in history. They typify immature believers.
- D. **The watchmen:** In the spiritual interpretation they represent spiritual leadership. The watchmen were the keepers of the walls, who guarded the walls of the city to protect the people. Initially, the Bride seeks their help (3:3), but eventually they strike and wound her (5:7).
- E. The Song of Solomon has two primary sections: chapters 1-4 and 5-8.
 - 1. The first four chapters of the Song focus on the **Bride’s Inheritance in Christ**. These chapters emphasize how God views and desires her and what we seek in Him.
 - 2. The last four chapters of the Song focus on **Jesus’ Inheritance in the Bride**. These chapters emphasize what He seeks from His people. He wants us to love Him with all our heart. The focus of the book makes a dramatic shift in the middle (4:16-5:1).

IV. TURNING THE SONG INTO PRAYER DIALOGUE WITH JESUS

- A. To receive the full benefits of the Song, we must turn it into an ongoing dialogue with Jesus. Learning the truths of the Song is only our starting point; the truths transform us as they become part of our prayer life and conversation with God. No one goes to a famous restaurant to study its menu; the menu is there to help them obtain a good meal. Likewise, we are missing out if we are just “connoisseurs” of the Song of Solomon; it must get into our conversation with God.
- B. I observe two general categories of truth in relation to meditating on the Word. The first category is related to truths that exhort us **to believe** something about God and/or His promises. The second category is related to truths that exhort us **to obey** God’s Word.
- C. Here are two ways to pray-read the Scriptures that exhort us **to believe** God’s Word.
*See *additional study material on this session for more on how to pray-read the Song.*
1. First, we **thank God** for the particular truth set forth, by turning it into a dialogue that includes taking time to say, “Thank You, Jesus” in a specific way. For example, when reading, “*You have ravished my heart,*” we respond by thanking God for this truth by praying, “Thank you, Jesus, that I ravish Your heart, that you delight in Your people.”
⁹You have ravished My heart, My sister, My spouse. (Song 4:9)
 2. Second, we **ask for understanding** of the truth as we seek to believe more. Ask God to release revelation that causes us to know and feel the power of specific truths (Eph. 1:17). For example, when reading, “*You have ravished my heart, my bride,*” ask Jesus for more insight by praying, “Show me how *I ravish Your heart* and fill you with delight.”
- D. Here are two ways to pray-read the Scriptures with truths that exhort us **to obey** God’s Word.
1. First, we **commit to obey** Jesus in the way described in a particular passage. We turn that specific truth into a simple dialogue with God that includes declaring our intention and commitment to obey Him according to the exhortation in that passage. For example, when He exhorted the Bride to “*rise up and come away*” to leave the comfort zone and follow Him, we commit to obey this truth by praying, “Jesus, I will rise from the comfort zone to meet You on the mountains of costly obedience (according to Song 4:6).”
¹⁰My Beloved...said to me: “Rise up, my love...and come away.” (Song 2:10)
 2. Second, we **ask for God’s help to obey** a particular truth in a passage. Ask the Spirit for help to obey specific exhortations in a passage. For example, when the Lord exhorts the Bride to “*arise and come away*” and follow Him in obedience to the mountains, we ask the Spirit to help us obey by praying, “Jesus, empower me to obey You as I arise from the comfort zone to meet you in costly obedience.”
- E. Take time to journal and write down your thoughts, prayers, and meditations as you pray-read through the Song. This will help you to capture the truths that the Lord puts on your heart. Be patient, speak slowly and softly, then journal your thoughts. You may be surprised how the Spirit will give you revelation, strengthen your obedience, and tenderize your heart as you do this.

V. THE GREATEST SONG

- A. Solomon was a prolific songwriter, writing 1005 songs (1 Kgs. 4:32). The Spirit inspired him to name this song using a superlative, the Song of Songs (like King of kings, Lord of lords, etc.). The Song of Solomon is one of the greatest songs in redemptive history. I refer to it as the Song. *¹The Song of Songs, which is Solomon's. (Song 1:1)*
- B. The advice I offer to those writing songs from the Song is to interpret the meaning of a passage and then sing the truth extolled in it, instead of using its exact symbolic language. For example, instead of singing of Jesus as being “*like a cluster of henna blooms in the vineyards of En Gedi*” (1:14), sing of His beauty as “matchless, perfect and beyond compare.”

VI. THE THEME OF THE SONG: TO ENCOUNTER JESUS IN HIS WORD

- A. The maiden made her request to the One with authority over the king, instead of directly asking the king. She said, “Let Him...” She asked the One who could influence the king in personal matters. We cry, “Father, let Him kiss me with the kisses of His Word.” This is a prayer request for grace to love Jesus with all our heart so as to walk out the first commandment (Mt. 22:37-38). *²Let him kiss me with the kisses of His mouth [Word]. (Song 1:2)*
- B. The Word of God proceeds from God's mouth. Our hearts live by the Word that comes from God's mouth. Jesus quoted Deuteronomy 8:3 during His temptation in the wilderness (Mt. 4:4). For 3,000 years, rabbis have referred to these “kisses of the mouth” as the “kiss of the Torah.” *³...that He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the LORD. (Deut. 8:3)*
- C. **Kiss of the Word:** This refers to encountering the Word in a way that reveals God's love and emotions for us. *It is a metaphor for spiritual intimacy with God.* We think of the Spirit touching our heart with the Word to expand our capacity to receive His love and to respond in love. Do not think of kissing Jesus on the mouth—such a perverse idea is not from God. We reject all interpretations of the “kisses of the Word” that relate to human sensuality.
- D. There are three metaphors of spiritual intimacy with God in the Song—the Divine kiss (1:2), the Divine seal (8:6), and the Divine embrace (2:5; 8:4). The Bride's journey starts with vision to receive the kisses of God's Word (1:2), and ends by her heart being sealed by God's love (8:6).
- E. Solomon writes this love song in a way that is reminiscent of his own experience with God. In his early years as king of Israel, God visited him in a dream to test him (2 Chr. 1; 1 Kgs. 3). The Lord allowed Solomon to make one supreme request, to ask God for anything. *⁷God appeared to Solomon, and said to him, “Ask! What shall I give you?”...¹⁰Now give me wisdom and knowledge...for who can judge this great people of Yours?”¹¹God said to Solomon: “Because this was in your heart, and you have not asked riches or wealth or honor or the life of your enemies, nor have you asked long life--but have asked wisdom and knowledge...¹²wisdom and knowledge are granted to you; I will give you riches and wealth and honor, such as none of the kings have had who were before you.” (2 Chr. 1:7-12)*

- F. Over the last fifty years, the Holy Spirit has emphasized various truths in the Bible that some call the “faith movement.” They are truths related to blessings that are released by praying in faith.

¹⁵***The prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. (Jas. 5:15)***

²³***“Whoever...believes that those things he says will come to pass, he will have whatever he says.” (Mk. 11:23)***

- G. God calls us to pray the prayer of faith that He might release the highest things in His heart to us. The prayer to receive the kisses of Word is to ask for grace to love God with all our heart.

- H. This is the most important prayer of faith for our personal lives. The Lord continues to test His people by allowing them to ask for anything, to see who will prioritize loving Him with all their heart over other blessings of God that may include receiving riches, honor, long life, etc.

²²***“And whatever things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive.” (Mt. 21:22)***

- I. The Spirit’s first priority and emphasis for the Church and for every believer’s life is to cultivate love for Jesus. Jesus referred to loving God as the first and greatest issue in the life of a believer. The grace to receive God’s love and to love Him in return is the greatest work of the Spirit in us. The greatest calling for anyone is to walk out the first commandment as they receive and express God’s love. This is to be the primary dream of our heart.

³⁷***“You shall love the LORD...³⁸This is the first and great commandment.” (Mt. 22:37-38)***

- J. We are to define our *primary success in life* as being ones who are loved by God and who love God. This is what determines our personal worth. We are to be anchored in this truth as the basis of our success and worth, rather than in our accomplishments, recognition, or possessions.

VII. PRACTICAL APPLICATION

- A. Praying for the “kisses of God’s Word” (1:2) or for God to seal our heart with His love (8:6) points to asking for more *insight into God’s emotions* (how He loves, desires, delights in His people) and growing in grace to faithfully *walk out the first and second commandments*.
- B. One way to receive the kisses of God’s Word is by pray-reading God’s Word as we set our heart to grow in grace to understand God’s love and faithfully walk in love.
- C. We must learn to live before an audience of One and receive our approval from our Master, which is more powerful than the approval of all others, and empowers the hearts of those who love Him.

VIII. QUESTIONS FOR SMALL-GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Identify one point that inspired or challenged you. Why? What will you do differently to apply it?
2. Identify one point that you want to impart to a younger believer. Why? How will you approach this?
3. Identify one point that you would like to gain more understanding of. How will you seek to gain it?