

Session 6 Challenging the Comfort Zone (Song 2:8-17)

I. REVIEW

- A. The Song of Solomon is the greatest love song in the Scriptures (1:1). It is a poem that has both a natural and spiritual interpretation in describing the beauty of married love and the spiritual relationship between Jesus and His Bride. This song uses language from an agricultural setting.

For those who are new to the Song of Solomon, I will give a one-minute introduction. This is the greatest love song in the Bible. It is called the Song of all other songs. There is no song like it. It is a poem, so the language is poetic. It is set in an agricultural setting, so you see a lot of symbolism related to animals, plants, vineyards, and orchards. In it, the Bible is describing the glory of married love of love between a man and his wife, and it is a picture of the love between Jesus and His Church. There are comparisons. There is a spiritual interpretation and a natural interpretation of this song, and both of them are important.

Of course we know that in our spiritual relationship with the Lord, He is the Bridegroom King and the Body of Christ is the Bride of Christ. There are no sexual overtones, and 99.9 percent of the people get that, but every now and then somebody gets a wrong idea, so we have to kind of settle that and make that really clear.

The real part of the relationship that is comparable to the marriage relationship is this deep partnership with a spirit of affirmation, confidence, and affection with open heartedness and mutual sharing in the task of partnership together. Those are the kind of principles that we find comparable to the marriage relationship.

- B. The Bride spent much time sitting before the King, experiencing delight in His presence (2:3). The Spirit solemnly charged others not to disturb her as she sat at His table under the tree (2:7).

³I sat down in His shade with great delight, and His fruit was sweet to my taste...⁷I charge you...do not stir up [disturb] nor awaken love until it pleases. (Song 2:3, 7)

In our last session in the teaching, we looked at the early part of Song of Solomon 2 where the Bride is described as spending much time sitting before the King. She is sitting in the presence of the King, and she is mandated to do this in a heightened way, in a way that is more than usual, because she is in a season of her life where she was meant to discover the sweetness of God's presence, and she was to maintain that for the rest of her spiritual life.

Also in the story line of Song of Solomon, she is discovering the beauty of the Bridegroom King. She is discovering the power of His love and getting established in her new identity in the beauty and the love of God as she is discovering also the sweetness of His presence. So in the first part of Song of Solomon 2 the Holy Spirit mandates concerning her: "Do not disturb her until she is established in these truths because she will need these truths the rest of her spiritual life."

II. OVERVIEW OF SONG 2:8-17

- A. The King called the Bride to a deeper partnership with Him. He revealed Himself to her as the sovereign King who has authority over all mountains (obstacles). He can easily leap over all obstacles. He called her out of the comfort zone so she might know deeper partnership with Him.

Well, some time passes, and here in verse 8-17, in the next season of her life, the Lord Himself now disturbs her. He says, in essence, "I have established you in these truths. Now in the power of these truths I want to challenge you to new things." So that is what He is doing here in this section. I will do a quick overview of the

section we are looking at, because this eight-chapter love song, this poem, is a description of our spiritual development in our relationship with the Lord.

Here the King is calling the Bride to a deeper partnership with Himself; that is the point of this new section. He says, in essence, “You have been established in these new discoveries of My beauty and the beauty that I have imparted to you, My confidence, My strong affection for you. You have grown in it. You see your new identity. Now I want you to rise up and walk in partnership with Me in this new season of your life.”

The Lord wants us to enjoy His presence, but He also wants us to partner with His purpose. Some folks are really into partnering with His purpose. They want to serve Him, but they do not take time to be established in this place of connecting in His presence. Others get so excited about the presence of the Lord in their personal life that they draw back from everything and do not partner with Him in His purpose. Well, it is not one or the other. He wants both of those realities developed in our spiritual life.

In this section here in Song of Solomon 2:8-17, He shows a new dimension of who He is. He shows Himself as the Sovereign King who has authority over all the mountains, all the obstacles, again using the poetic language of that agricultural setting. He shows Himself as the One who triumphs over every obstacle. He is leaping on the mountains, and nothing can hinder Him. Nothing can challenge Him because He has all authority.

She is amazed at this, but then suddenly He looks at her and calls her. He says, “I challenge you now to rise up and join Me leaping on mountains.”

She is very hesitant because she is fearful, so she hesitates in her fear, and she draws back. “Lord, jump on mountains with You? No, I would rather stay in the season I am in right now under the apple tree, sitting at the table, under the apple tree, feasting and celebrating our love together. I do not want to leave the table under the apple tree to go leap on mountains. I really do not want to do that. I would rather sit than leap. That is really what I would rather do, Lord. So I am glad You are like that, but I would rather watch You at a distance.” That is kind of the posture that she is taking here.

- B. A spiritual crisis in her life began when the King introduced the “we will run after You” phase of her spiritual life. In Song 1:5-7, she faced her first spiritual crisis as she discovered her sin—her crisis was related to her *fear* of going to the mountains of full faith and obedience (2:10). Her struggle with fear was not an expression of rebellion towards God but spiritual immaturity.
- C. She was called to overcome *fear with courage to obey* and *shame with confidence in God’s love*.

III. JESUS REVEALS HIMSELF TO HER AS THE SOVEREIGN KING (2:8-9)

- A. The Bride saw Jesus as the Lord of all nations who has easily conquered all the mountains—He is like a gazelle or a young stag (adult male deer) who leaps victoriously on the mountains.

⁸***The voice of my Beloved! Behold, He comes leaping upon the mountains, skipping upon the hills.***

⁹***My Beloved is like a gazelle or a young stag. (Song 2:8-9a)***

So the Bride saw Jesus as the Lord of all the nations who easily conquers all the mountains. She sees Him, using the New Testament language to interpret this love song between Jesus and a believer, as the Lord of all nations.

Let’s read it here in verse 8. She says, “The voice of my Beloved!” Remember the verse before the Holy Spirit said not to disturb her, for no one to interrupt what He was doing in her life right then.

It is sometime later, and the Lord interrupts her. He says, “Now it is time for you to go forward and for an additional challenges to come to your life. I want you to be challenged to go to new places with Me.”

So in verse 8, she says, “The voice of my Beloved!” She hears His call, and she says, “Behold!” She is surprised. He comes leaping on mountains. He is not sitting at the table under the shade tree like earlier in the chapter. Now He is leaping on mountains, skipping on hills. “My beloved is like a gazelle or a young stag,” this deer leaping boundlessly, with boundless energy, effortlessly leaping over all that would be obstacles that would get in the way. So she sees this, and she is amazed at Him. She loves His power and authority and that nothing can hinder Him or stop Him.

- B. *The voice of my Beloved:*** The King called her to a new season in the Spirit for her life. She recognized the voice of her Beloved, the One she loved. Jesus speaks tenderly to us in love when He calls us out of the comfort zone to join Him on the dangerous mountains of risk.

The voice of her Beloved, the King, calls her to a new season in the spirit. He is going to say in a moment, “I want you to rise up and join Me.” There are seasons in our spiritual life where the Lord gives us new challenges that are big challenges. They are challenges like, “Come to the mountains,” and there are mountains of obstacles that get in the way. Often our first response is that we are hesitant with fear, and we find that is how she responds in verse 17. She draws back, but eventually she fully responds. At first she hesitates in fear. She actually refuses Him while she is wrestling through the issue. The story line is that the Lord is tender with her and comes alongside her. He helps her and woos her. He loves on her because He does not see her hesitation in fear as rebellion; He sees it as immaturity.

There is a big difference between somebody who hesitates in fear because they are spiritually immature and someone who is defiant, refuses the Lord’s leadership, and has no intention of obeying Him. Rebellion and immaturity are miles apart, but the enemy comes in when we are struggling in fear. The enemy comes in and says, “You are just a hopeless hypocrite. You are a rebel. You are just finished!”

We get overwhelmed with our failure, but the truth is that the Lord is speaking very differently. He is saying, “I see your hesitation and fear. I am going to help you. You are the one I love. I know that you actually love Me. Your love is immature, but your love is real.” The Lord loves the relationship. He wants to help us and sees our desire to love Him. He speaks in such a tender tone of reasoning with her to persuade her to rise up, to enter into this new partnership with His purpose.

This is so different from how the enemy twists the conversation. Because when we struggle, when we are wrestling through an issue, and we have determined to obey, but we are not there in the full maturity of that obedience, and we are struggling with that, and we are hesitating, and we are wrestling, and we are falling, the enemy comes and says, “You hopeless hypocrite, the Lord is finished with you.”

We even talk to ourselves that way. We even talk to each other that way. The Lord comes and says, “That is not My voice. I am speaking in tenderness and affirmation. I see your budding virtues, your intention to love that is not mature, and I am going to call that forth in you.”

Again by the end of the story line—it is an eight-chapter story line, an eight-chapter poem or song—she fully obeys, and she fully responds. We see the voice of the Lord and His approach to her. We see her struggle, but also her confidence in the love of God and her refusal of shame, even in the midst of the struggle. Beloved, the Lord wants us to resist and overcome shame with confidence in His mercy and tenderness, in confidence that He enjoys the relationship, that He actually wants to help us, and that He wants to enter in the struggle with us and walk us through it, holding our hand. The Lord wants us to overcome the natural shame we feel, to have confidence in His love and His involvement in our life. The Lord wants us to have courage to obey fully even

though we hesitate in fear on the front end. He **is** with us. He is going to stay with us. He is resolute. He will not back away from the call to new levels of obedience, but He is patient with us, and He walks us through, step by step, until that spirit of courage is strengthened in our heart, and we do obey Him. He enjoys the relationship with us **while** we are growing, not only **after** we mature.

So the King is calling her to a new season. “Come to the mountains with Me.” He is calling her to new challenges, these big challenges of new areas of service, additional things He is inviting her to do. He is calling us to participate with Him, to new ways of our lifestyle to obey the Lord and to new abandonment to bring our all into the relationship with Him in even a greater way.

- C. **Mountains:** Mountains often speak of obstacles. Jesus has authority over all obstacles, both human and demonic. We are to speak to the mountains of adversity, commanding them to be removed. The hills speak of the smaller difficulties or challenges that we face. Zerubbabel was to speak grace to the mountains of adversity that stood before him (Zech. 4:7).

²³“**I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, ‘Be removed and be cast into the sea,’ and does not doubt in his heart...those things he says will come to pass.” (Mk. 11:23)**

The mountains speak of the big obstacles that are in the way. They are obstacles to our obedience, and they are obstacles to our comfort. We look at these obstacles, we feel they are too risky, and we become afraid. We look at the obstacles to our comfort, and we say, “If we obey this new challenge You are giving us, Lord, it is going to be difficult. It is either going to take a lot of time and effort, or it is going to be too hard. It is too much time and effort or it is just too risky. I could fail, and the shame of failure and the despair of failure, I do not want to deal with that.”

Maybe we think it is too difficult because we think, “I will get no recognition. It is an assignment out of the way that nobody will affirm or applaud or even see. You will see it, Lord, but nobody else will. I will feel a bit left out if I do that assignment. I am going to miss out on other things.”

Or, “Maybe if I take on that assignment, I will get criticized. Lord, I just do not want these new challenges. Let’s just keep things like they are. I am enjoying You at the table, under the shade tree, eating apples with You. Everything is great. Why are You calling me to the mountains with You?”

The Lord gives us these new challenges because He knows that in them we will discover new things about Him. He will enjoy new things about us, and we will enjoy new dimensions of the relationship. So He says, “No, you must come with Me on My terms.” He is constantly inviting us, beckoning us, charging us to bring more of ourselves into the relationship. He wants more of our time, more of our money, more of our inward thoughts and the way we process our life. He says, “I want to be the Lord of all that. I want to be your All-in-all. I want us to do it together forever.” That is what is on the Lord’s heart.

- D. The King stood behind a wall of protection, looking into the house in which the Bride sat undisturbed. Similarly, Jesus stood outside the door of the Laodicean church (Rev. 3:20).

⁹**He stands behind our wall; He is looking through the windows, gazing through the lattice. (Song 2:9b)**

She has seen Him leaping on the mountains, skipping on hills. She said, “Behold”—wow, I have never seen this part of You! I have never seen You with such authority and energy that nothing can stop you. Then she goes on, she is still speaking in verse 8-9. She is describing what she is seeing in her Beloved. Again, in the New Testament language, it is the believer talking to the Lord in this poetic language again through this agricultural context. She says, “I see Him jumping on, leaping on mountains, skipping on hills.” Then in verse 9, she says

that He stands behind our wall looking through the windows, gazing through the lattice or just through the windows in essence. Looking at her, wooing her with His eyes, He is beckoning her to come. He is looking at her first. She is in the garden, behind the wall, under the tree, at the table where she was earlier in Song of Solomon 2.

She sees Him, and she says, “I have never seen You out there. You have always been inside the garden, but now you are outside. You are jumping on hills. I have only seen You seated at tables. Hum, what is going on here? Why are You looking at me this way?” It is a new look. He is staring at her; it is that gaze of the Lord where He is calling her forth. It is the beginning of that challenge of the Lord.

- E. **Stands:** When Jesus stands, He is ready for action. He is also pictured in Scripture as sitting in rest and victory with His feet upon His enemies (Ps. 110:1). When Stephen died, the Lord stood up to receive him (Acts 7:55). The Lord stood to speak to the Laodicean church (Rev. 3:20).

He is standing behind our wall. Now when the Lord is described in the Bible, Father or Son, the Lord is almost always described as seated. God is pictured mostly in Scripture as seated in authority, seated in confidence, seated in rest, all of His enemies brought beneath His feet, subduing all that oppose Him.

Occasionally we find the resurrected Christ described as standing. It is unusual, but when He is standing, He is postured as ready for action. He is ready for action. So when you see the Lord standing in the Scripture, there is action that He is taking. But here it is more than that. It is action that He is beckoning His people to take hold of with Him.

- F. **Behind our wall:** She described the wall as “our” wall. It is not *her* wall, but *their* wall, because she had been led by the Spirit to remain undisturbed at the table until He called her to leave the place of sitting at the table feasting on Him (2:4, 7).

She makes this one statement that I think is important to notice. She says, “He is standing behind **our** wall.” Notice she says, in essence, “It is not my wall. It is not His wall. It is a wall of our making together.” Meaning, it was in the will of God that He told me to focus in this season of sitting before Him at the table in these new discoveries of His beauty and His love and finding out the new discoveries of my identity in Him and discovering the sweetness of His presence.

Remember earlier in Song of Solomon 2:7 it was the Holy Spirit, “Do not disturb her. I have called her to this season.”

So she acknowledges this to Him as she says, “You know it is **our** wall. It is not a barrier between us because You are the One who put me in this season.”

The Lord would say, “Yes, I have had you in that season, but now I am changing the season. Now I am challenging you with big, new challenges in terms of ministry assignments of service and the way that you carry your lifestyle and your heart before Me. I am asking for a new level of responsiveness to Me.

These are big areas. These are not just the little nudgings of the Holy Spirit, you know, the day-by-day nudging and the leading of the Spirit. “Come to the mountain” speaks of those bigger challenges that happen occasionally in our life where we change our lifestyle or we take on a new assignment in the kingdom.

Again it might be an assignment that nobody even knows about. The difficulty might be in the fact that nobody recognizes it, there is no honor, and there is no applause of man. Maybe it is just really risky, or it might be really time consuming, with no thanks coming. It might bring a lot of criticism. So He comes with these big challenges that really touch our heart in a personal way.

IV. CALLED OUT OF THE COMFORT ZONE TO DEEPER PARTNERSHIP WITH JESUS

- A. The King called her to a deeper partnership with Himself. This is what she had prayed for (1:4). This speaks of the time when Jesus comes to us, calling us to respond in a new measure of faith and obedience. We must either respond or go backwards in our relationship with Him.

¹⁰*My Beloved spoke, and said to me: “**Rise up, My love, My fair one, and come away.**” (Song 2:10)*

Now the Lord begins to speak for the first time since she has been looking at Him leaping on mountains, standing outside the garden, looking through the window. She sees that beckoning look, but now He says it with His mouth. “My Beloved spoke to me,” verse 10. “He said to me, ‘Arise.’” That is, “I want you. I am calling you to action. I want you not only enjoying My presence, but I want you to partner with Me in My purposes. I want you to rise and come with Me to the mountains.”

Again these mountains represent new assignments in the Lord. It may be a new area of service that we are to believe Him for or to take hold of that is risky. There is criticism again. Or assignments where they are just hard or they are out of the sight of other people, but He wants us to do it faithfully. He says, “Rise up, come away with Me.” He says, “It is going to take action. It is going to take involvement on your part.”

Notice He says, “Rise up, My love.” Or My fair or beautiful one. So we see this tone of affection and tenderness because He knows that she is going to refuse Him. She is going to hesitate in her fear initially. It is a temporary refusal; it is not a long-term one. It is a wrestling-through period. So He knows in verse 17 that she is going to refuse Him, but He is talking in such a tone of tenderness and affirmation. He is not going to reject her because she is hesitating in fear. He is going to continue to woo her. He is going to continue to call her forth in love and in the context of what she learned in Song of Solomon chapter 1 about this shame-free, confident relationship in His love, even in her weakness. She has this confidence instead of being overcome with shame. He is going to call forth that in her life that she would stand in that confidence before Him.

1. **Spoke:** He spoke tenderly to the Bride, calling her “My love and fair one”—beautiful one. Knowing that she would refuse His request, He still considered her beautiful, just as when her vineyard was not kept (1:7-8). We are more motivated to obey Him when we feel loved and beautiful in His eyes. When Jesus corrects His people, He speaks with a tone of tenderness and love, without harshness.

¹³*“**Rise up, My love, My fair [beautiful] one, and come away!**” (Song 2:13)*

In verse 13 He speaks again the same thing He spoke in verse 10. In verse 10 He said, “Rise up, My love, My fair one, come away.” In verse 13 He repeats it. He says, “Let Me say it again. I want you to rise up. I am resolute. I am not backing down from this. I am going to stay with this until you say yes.” Even in the midst of her temporary hesitation and her fear in refusing Him, He says, in effect, “I am staying with it. I am not just staying with the resoluteness. I am inviting you. I am beckoning you to this new challenge. I am staying with it because I love you, because you are the one I love.” He says that in verse 10, and He says it again in verse 13 in order to affirm her.

Now when we hear the harsh tone of the taskmaster, it is not the voice of the Holy Spirit. The enemy comes and twists it because the enemy wants us to hear a harsh taskmaster when we feel challenged. I tell you it is the tenderness of the Bridegroom King who speaks. That is the true voice of the Lord and the voice of the Word and the voice of the Spirit. It is this tender beckoning, reminding us of His goodness, reminding us of our sincerity even in the midst of our immaturity. That emboldens us to want to run to Him in confidence, instead of run from Him in shame.

2. **Rise up:** He called her to arise from her comfort and security to come away with Him to conquer the mountains (of this fallen world). Jesus commissioned His Bride to work with Him as He brings the nations to obedience (Mt. 28:19).

¹⁹**“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations.” (Mt. 28:19)**

When He says, “Rise up,” He is calling her to arise from her comfort and her security. He is asking her to take risk, to take on some risky things, some difficult things. There is a certain rigorousness and risk of going to the mountain. Going to the mountain takes time and energy. It is new areas of service, new ways of carrying our heart in new lifestyle, new dimensions of our lifestyle where we are more fully yielded to the Lord in our everyday lifestyle.

Speaking through the lens of the New Testament, the Father has called Jesus to disciple the nations, so Jesus calls us to partner with Him in discipling nations. We disciple ones and twos, threes and fours, but that is our part of partnering with Him. So here He is saying, in essence, “I am beckoning you to come to the mountains, to come with Me. I have authority over all the nations. Partner with Me in this mandate the Father has given Me.”

3. Jesus challenges us to arise and obey Him in the mountains. This refers to embracing difficult areas of obedience and ministry assignments that challenge our sense of security and comfort. She did not like the risks associated with the mountains, wanting only to sit under the shade tree eating apples with the King (2:3).

Jesus commands us to obey Him by going to the mountains. Again, that is symbolic language. This refers to embracing difficult areas of obedience in our lifestyle, some lifestyle changes. I am not saying that every day He tells us something new. It is more like every year or two when He will give us a big, new challenge. He may say, “I want you to spend your time and money this way, not that way.” Or, “I want you to change your words, or to carry your heart differently, or your relational style, the way you approach relationships. I do not want you guarded in retreat. I want you humble, openhearted, reconciling, connecting with and blessing your enemies.” All of these things are not natural to us. We would rather retreat in our relational style and stay away from anything that is challenging or difficult. The Lord is saying, “No, I want you to move in love. I want you to go the other way.” Those are some of those mountain issues.

It also refers not only to areas of obedience in our lifestyle, but also to new ministry assignments that I have already mentioned, areas of service. Maybe it is an additional challenge, “Would you serve in My kingdom in this way?” It might be in the marketplace, in the neighborhood, in the church ministries. It might be in the soccer league. There are different ways where God wants us to serve in His kingdom.

It is a new challenge. We might feel, “If I take on that challenge, what if I am not good at it? What if it is too hard? What if I get criticized? What if I am ignored? What if? What if? What if? What if? What if?”

He says, “Rise up and join me in the mandate that I have over all the nations. Come to the mountains with Me, and I will be with you in it.”

4. John Wimber said that faith is spelled R. I. S. K. Faith is the way of the kingdom.
 - B. The question is—is it safe to go with Jesus, even if He takes us outside our comfort zone? Or will we miss out on things if we obey Him 100%? When we operate in the flesh, it seems safer to be “in the boat” without Jesus rather than “on the water” with Him.

Well, the great question of the hour is always, is it safe to go with Jesus even if it is outside our comfort zone. I mean when He is outside the comfort zone, challenging us in a new area, is it really safe to leave the comfort zone and go join Him? Of course we know the answer is yes.

This preaches really easily; it lives a little differently. I find this is easy to preach, but when He is doing this, it is a very searching passage in my life. What I am saying is that many of us are here in this community are so familiar with Song of Solomon 2, but I tell you, do not get so familiar with Song of Solomon 2 that it no longer searches your heart and beckons you in those key moments.

Again these moments come every year or two. It is not the sort of thing where every day you are getting a new challenge. That is not what I am talking about. I am talking about the major, new embracing of new challenges in the big areas of our life.

You know the story of Jesus walking on the water. He goes to His disciples who are in the boat. He beckons Peter to come out of the boat and walk on water with Him, and that is a great story because it worked. Well, let's say it this way: it is a great story because it eventually worked. That is, Peter gulped a little water for a few steps there. I mean he sank, if you remember the story. He got out of the boat and sank because he got his eyes off the Lord, and he gulped, had to tread a little water, get a little lake water in there, whatever. Then it did eventually work, when the Lord recovered him and he thought, "Oh boy, that was intense."

So is it safer to be on the water with Jesus? Or is it safer to be in the boat without Jesus? Now we know it is safer on the water, but our tendency is always to stay in the boat or certainly the majority of the time, just stay in the boat, and that is where the bride is at right now. Because going to the mountains and staying in the boat is the same thing, it is just different symbolic language. She is hesitating. She is wrestling. She wants to obey. She is going to obey, but there is an initial hesitation going on at this point in time.

C. The fundamental issue for the Bride is whether or not she believes Jesus' leadership to be good.

The foundational issue before her is whether she believes that Jesus' leadership is good. Do we really believe His leadership is good? Because when we believe His leadership is good, we are willing to get out of the boat and get on the water, or, using this passage in Song of Solomon, rise up from the table and go to the mountains. Whatever analogy we use, if His leadership is good, we can lose opportunities and challenge the safety zone or the comfort zone, and our obedience to Him in being close to Him in partnership is the best place. It is the good place of life, even though we might miss opportunities in the natural because we are obeying Him in this new level of giving of ourselves with Him.

Now there is a principle in the kingdom that most of you are familiar with, that as we grow in our relationship with the Lord, He is always going to ask for a greater response. If we give a response at a level of three, it shows our fullness is at a three. Eventually He is going to say, "I want a new level of response, at a four. I want a new level of confidence and obedience from you." Then we get to a four, and a year or two goes by, and we get used to a four. So He says, "Now I want a new response. I want a five. I want you to bring your all into the relationship, and I want your all to get bigger and bigger." Because only in growing in our responsiveness do we walk in the glory of the relationship that He offers to us, and He knows that.

*Now the only way that we can avoid losing ground spiritually, the only way we can avoid not going back spiritually is by going forwards. Some people have this very wrong idea that if they are growing in the Lord they can just kind of push pause, hit save on the document, and just stay there. Like, "Okay, I think the Lord and I are happy here. I think I will just camp out here the next couple decades. You know, I love Him, He loves me and business is going well, family is doing okay. You know I read the Word a little bit here and there. I am involved a little bit in outreach. I will just hit **pause**."*

It does not work that way because the only way you can keep from going backwards is by going forwards. If you are not going forward and taking new ground in your spiritual relationship with the Lord, then you are losing ground. You are. There is no static position where you get to a certain place and you stay there.

No one in this room is the same place they were three months ago spiritually. You are more tender and have a more vibrant relationship with the Lord than three months ago or you have less vibrant relationship. No one is the same as they were three months ago or three years ago. We are always going forward or we are going backwards incrementally, slowly.

I tell you this: the only way we can keep the ground that we have gained in the spirit is by taking new ground. I define “losing ground” as having a dull heart, having a spiritual boredom in our relationship with the Lord, losing that vibrant relationship with the Lord. Now many believers are content to live with a dull, boring relationship with the Lord, but many of you are not. You are saying, “No, I want to go on.” The Lord would say that the only way you are going to go on is if you keep gaining ground. When you stop gaining ground, you will start losing ground. That is how it works.

Now the Lord does not love us less. He does not even enjoy us less, but we enjoy the relationship with Him less; that is what is really going on. I am talking now to your sanctified selfishness, you know, that in a sanctified way we want to enjoy Him more, and that is a good thing.

A lot of folks get stuck because they refuse to go forward in those every year or two or whenever—there is no exact time frame—when He beckons us to new level of responsiveness. They do not say yes, and a few years go by, they look back, and they have had a dull heart for years.

The Lord says, “I mean it! I really want you to come to the mountains. When I say, ‘Come to the mountains,’ I mean it.” He is in charge of the relationship, not us. Again, a lot of folks get stuck in this posture of spiritual boredom and dullness that is not necessary because they have refused to keep going forward.

- D. The King pointed to the prophetic signs of soon-coming fruitfulness (2:11-13). He encouraged the Bride by revealing that it was the time for the harvest, for new fruitfulness.

¹¹For lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone. ¹²The flowers appear on the earth; the time of singing has come, and the voice of the turtledove is heard in our land. ¹³The fig tree puts forth her green figs, and the vines with the tender grapes give a good smell. Rise up, My love, My fair one, and come away! (Song 2:11-13)

Now the Lord is going to persuade her. He is going to reason with her in verse 11-12. In verse 11 He says, “For lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone. The winter season is past, and it is gone.” The point He is going to make here is, “In the winter season you responded to Me throughout the years in the winter season, and now that you look back you can see My goodness in your life. You can see that even those difficult winter seasons were fruitful. They were good for you. So if My leadership was good in those seasons when you responded, do not be afraid now. My leadership is good now when I am calling you to a new challenge to go to the mountains.”

In the agricultural language of this love song, He gives four different examples in verse 12 of budding fruitfulness that is on the verge of coming to full maturity. He is going to say that these are signs that the budding fruitfulness is going to come all the way if you respond rightly. In verse 12 He says to look around. He says to look at the flowers that appear on the earth. Now the flower appears on the apple tree before the apples do, but when the flower appears, the apple is soon coming.

He is saying in essence to her, you are approaching the harvest season of your life. You are in a time where those budding virtues in you, the flowers, are already appearing in you. Come all the way through; come to full fruitfulness. He is calling to full fruitfulness, internal fruitfulness in her character and external fruitfulness in her ministry. He says that the flowers are already appearing, the apple is soon to come.

Next He says that the voice of the turtledove is heard in the land. When the dove begins cooing, the harvest is right around the corner.

He says in verse 13 that the fig tree puts forth the green figs. When the green figs come, the ripe figs are right around the corner.

Then He says that the vineyards have tender grapes and that you can smell the fragrances. When you can smell the fragrance in the vineyard, the harvest of the vineyard is around the corner. He is saying, “Look, there are so many virtues that are budding in your life. You are moments away from maturity in these areas. Do not draw back now. Look back. In the winter seasons I was with you. In this season, go all the way with Me. Do not draw back and push pause on the relationship now. Let those areas come to fullness.”

E. Jesus points His people to the past and present to awaken faith to prepare for a coming harvest.

He appeals to the past, and then He appeals to the present, to awaken her confidence. That is how the Lord talks to us. He appeals to the past in those times when we did respond to Him in difficulty. We look back and say, “You know, it really did turn out for good. Romans 8:28, everything did work out together for good for those who love God.”

1. **The past:** The King reminded her of His faithfulness in the past winter season. The winter season is dark with cold rains. It is a difficult time, when few things grow outwardly. Jesus reminds us of His intervention and faithfulness in the past in bringing us through the winter seasons of life. If Jesus faithfully helped us in past difficulties, He will also help us in future ones. Jesus will not neglect us as we “go up the mountain” (2:10).

The winter speaks of the difficult time in our life when only a few things grow outwardly. In the winter season, you do not see the growth. It is the difficult time. He says, “Look at the difficult times where you could not see the growth in that hour, but you can see it now looking back on it.”

2. **The present:** The King pointed out specific conditions that proved that the harvest was not far away. He noted four signs: flowers appearing on a vine signify that the harvest of grapes is soon to follow: the voice of the turtledove is heard at harvest time; fig trees put forth young green figs, which ripen into mature brown figs; the fragrance of tender young grapes indicates the approaching harvest.

He talks to her now about the present time. He appeals to four signs to prove the harvest is not far away. There is a full maturity coming in what He is challenging her with, if she will respond. Do not bail out of the relationship, do not retreat is what He is saying, keep going forward with Me.

F. The King revealed His tender affection for the Bride as she struggled through her fears (2:14).

¹⁴O My dove, in the clefts of the rock, in the secret places of the cliff, let Me see your face, let Me hear your voice; for your voice is sweet, and your face is lovely. (Song 2:14)

He knows she is going to hesitate in fear and refuse Him, just temporarily refuse Him. He also knows she is going to come all the way through in full obedience before the end of this eight-chapter love. She comes all the way through, and it is a picture of the different seasons we go through in maturing in our walk with the Lord.

1. **My dove:** He affirmed her sincerity. A dove speaks of purity and loyalty. He knew that she would initially compromise (2:17), but that it was in her heart to obey Him.

Verse 14 is a very tender passage. This is the King speaking to the Bride in the Song of Solomon, or the Lord speaking to His Church using the New Testament language. He says, “O My dove in the cleft of the rock”—verse 14—“in the secret place of the cliff.” Some translations say “in the secret place of the stairs, of the steep stairway.” And then He says, “Let Me see your face. Let Me hear your voice, for your voice is sweet and your face is lovely.”

He is motivating her. He sees her hesitation, and He moves right in. He says, number one, “O My dove.” He affirms her sincerity. He sees her hesitate, but He does not look at her and say, “You snake, you rat, you wolf, you fox, what are you doing? You know I have had it with you, you rat! Get out of here.” That is not how He talks. Now believe it or not, but if that is how we hear Him, that is really the voice of the enemy. That is the real snake talking, and that is even how we talk to each other. The Lord says, “No, do not talk to yourself that way! Do not talk to others that way. Look for the sincerity and woo them forth. Affirm. See the virtue that is there, that budding virtue, and call it forth.”

2. **Clefts of the rock:** This speaks of the work of the cross. Jesus was the spiritual Rock in Moses’ day, and is the Rock on which the Church is built (1 Cor. 10:4; cf. Mt. 16:18).
 - a. God hid Moses in the cleft of the rock—an open space or gap in the mountain rock—to protect him from being struck dead by seeing the glory of God’s face.

²⁰“You cannot see My face; for no man shall see Me, and live...²¹Here is a place by Me, and you shall stand on the rock...²²while My glory passes by...I will put you in the cleft of the rock, and will cover you with My hand while I pass by.”
(Ex. 33:20-22)
 - b. God hiding Moses in the cleft of the rock is a type of salvation through Jesus’ death. “Cleft of the rock” also speaks of the wound to Jesus’ side during His crucifixion.

Then He says, “I want to see you, My dove, in the cleft of the rocks, in the secret place of the cliff.” That is where I want to hear your voice and see your face, in the cleft of the rock, in the secret place of the cliff.

The cleft of the rock, in New Testament language, speaks of Jesus’ work on the cross. Because Jesus is the rock and it was the wounds in His side that provided our ability to relate to God in the midst of the glory of God. One of the passages that really shows the work of salvation in the Old Testament, an Old Testament passage that describes salvation in a symbolic way, is the one in Exodus 33 where God hid Moses in the cleft of the rock in order for Moses to experience the glory of God. I am not going to develop that now. I have quite a bit more of this on my notes on the internet in the extended outline so I am not going to take time on that right now.

3. **Secret places of the cliff:** This speaks of Jesus’ resurrection—the ultimate “secret place,” in which a Man ascended to God. The secret place of *the cliff* (NKJV) is also translated as secret place of *the stairs* (KJV) and secret place of *the steep pathway* (NASB).

This cleft in the rock speaks of Jesus’ work on the cross in this poem language in the agricultural setting where the mountains and the cliffs are just outside the farm, and they are all familiar with this kind of language. He says in number three, in the secret place of the cliff or the secret place of the stair or the steep pathway; this speaks of Jesus’ resurrection. The idea is they are standing at the bottom, looking up at this steep pathway, this steep cliff, and Jesus is the only Man who was qualified to ascend up that steep stairway, that stairway to heaven. This is the picture in this symbolic love poem of the resurrection. He is the Man who ascended. He went up that steep pathway after He endured the wounds in His own side, being the cleft in the rock.

- G. Jesus wants to see our face and hear our voice in worship and prayer as we cry for help (2:14). We can tell Jesus that we love Him, without fearing that He sees us as hypocrites. Some think that when they struggle with sin, their voice is repulsive to God, and their face is ugly to Him, but God wants us to run *to* Him in confidence, instead of *from* Him in condemnation.

**¹⁴Let Me see your face, let Me hear your voice; for your voice is sweet, and your face is lovely.
(Song 2:14)**

He is saying, in essence, “I want to see your face. I want to hear your voice. I want to see your face and hear your voice in the cleft of the rock, in the steep stairway, in the confidence of the finished work of the cross in the resurrection.”

He answers the unspoken question, “Why do I want to see your voice? Why do I want to see your face and hear your voice? Why do I want to hear your voice?” He might say, “I want to hear you cry out for help. I want you to bring Me into the struggle that you are in right now. I want to help you, and I will help you more if you call Me into the struggle. You are wrestling with your fear. You are wanting to retreat and go backwards. Ask Me to help you. I can help you, and I will help you more if you will bring Me into the dialogue, Bring Me into the struggle with your fear. I will be there, I will be your strength, I will help you. I will hold you by the hand and walk you through step by step until you get to that mountain.”

*Again in the story line she **does** make it all the way through into full obedience. Of course it is in the next six chapters of the book that we see it portrayed in such a beautiful way. He makes this most startling statement. He says, “Your voice is sweet to Me, and your face is lovely.” Now how could her voice be sweet? Her prayers are sweet, her worship is sweet to Him, and her face is lovely. But in verse 17 she is going to hesitate and temporarily refuse Him. How could her voice be sweet?*

Our image of God often is that He is the harsh taskmaster. And when we hesitate or we refuse, He is rebuking us, writing us off, and threatening us. “It is over. I am done with you. This is the last time...we are not going there again.” Beloved, that is NOT the voice of the Bridegroom King. He looks at her and He says, “Even in your struggle, invite Me into the struggle, and in it you are sweet and your face is lovely. I love the interaction with you.”

Jesus wants to see our face and hear our voice in worship and prayer. He wants us to ask Him to be a part of the struggle with all that we are going through.

- H. The Bride prayed for deliverance from small compromises (2:15). She responded to the King’s exhortation to see her face and hear her voice by praying for help (2:14).

**¹⁵Catch us the foxes, the little foxes that spoil the vines, for our vines have tender grapes.
(Song 2:15)**

So in verse 15 she offers her prayers. She says, “You want to hear my voice? Here is my voice. Here is my prayer for help.” She says, “Lord, catch us the foxes, the little foxes that spoil the vines, for our vines have tender grapes.” She is responding to the King. She is praying for help right now. It is as though she says, “In verse 14, You told me that You wanted to hear my voice. Verse 15, here is my voice: help me, help me catch the fox.”

1. **Little foxes:** The foxes in the vineyard of our heart speak of our small compromises; *they include fear, sinful attitudes and words, and misuse of our time and money.* Foxes are cunning animals that will destroy a vineyard under cover of the night. They are not bold, like lions that attack in the day, but are small, fast, crafty, and hard to catch.

The little foxes are the small compromises in our heart. One preacher called the little foxes “the nickel and dime sins.” If we do not deal with the small compromises we will end up not being equipped to answer the big challenges. When the Lord gives a big challenge—come to the mountain—I mean often we retreat; we have fear.

The Lord says, “I want you to deal with the small compromises, the little foxes that are destroying the vineyard of your heart. The nickel and dime areas where you ignore My leadership. I want you to bring the little compromises into the light with Me as well, because I can help you in those and that will strengthen you to embrace the bigger challenges that I am calling you to embrace at this point in time.”

These little foxes, well, it is like the little girl said the other day, “The fox is so cute.” I tell you, that cute little fox will bite you. That is not a cute pet. A cute little fox is not a good pet to have. That little fox will bite you! Foxes are hard to catch. They are small, they are fast, and they are crafty. You cannot grab them, and then if you do, they bite you. Stay away from foxes. Get rid of those little foxes. Do not buy one. Do not pet one. Do not feed one. Get rid of them.

2. **Spoil the vine:** Her “vineyard,” throughout the Song, refers to her heart and spiritual life.

They will destroy the vine of the heart, which speaks of her heart and her spiritual life. The nickel and dime compromises dull our spiritual relationship. They bring dullness to our walk with God. Then we are not in a posture to take on the big challenges because we feel shame, we are dull, and we are distracted from the Lord; we do not have that sense of fascination and exhilaration that He wants in our relationship with us.

3. **Catch us:** Catching the foxes requires “us”—the Bride and the King—working together. We cannot catch them by ourselves, so we cry for help. The Lord is so willing to help us.

So she cries out in verse 3, “Help me catch the foxes!” You and me together, Lord, we can conquer these little compromises. Then I will be strengthened to take on the big challenges.

- I. In the midst of the Bride’s struggle, she expressed confidence in God’s love (2:16). This confidence is necessary for all who seek to be consistent in praying for help, as seen in verse 15.

¹⁶***My Beloved is mine, and I am His. He feeds his flock among the lilies.* (Song 2:16)**

1. **Is mine:** She was confident that her Beloved *was hers*—He belonged to her, His heart open to her; He had not abandoned her. Even in our weakness, Jesus is accessible to us.
2. **The lilies:** She said she was “the lily of the valley” (2:1). Here, *lilies* is in the plural. Our spiritual safety is found in close relationship with other believers who pursue purity.

- J. The Bride’s painful compromise (2:17). She refused the King’s command to arise to join Him on the mountains (2:13). She told Him to *turn* and go without her until the day breaks to give her light. She refused to obey because of fear. She was responding in her immaturity, not rebellion.

¹⁷***Until the day breaks and the shadows flee away, turn, my Beloved, and be like a gazelle or a young stag upon the mountains of Bethel.* (Song 2:17)**

This is amazing. This passage of verse 16, look what she says. This is so amazing to me, that here she is hesitating in fear, and so she says no to Him, a temporary refusal. She is very sincere. She calls Him, “My Beloved is mine and I am His.” Look at this language of confidence. There is no shame here. What she learned in Song of Solomon 1 is really supporting her in this great crisis of challenge in her life.

She says, “I know that You love me, and I am not going to run from You. I am not going to retreat in isolation. I am going to come to You because You are my Beloved. You are mine. I know You are fully accessible to me, and I know that I am Yours. You love me, and I love You. My love is weak, but my weak love is not false love. It is sincere. It is just weak.” So she has this confidence, this shamelessness, this confidence in love that the Lord honors her prayer, that the Lord actually esteems the relationship and that He is going to help her.

K. *Until the day breaks:* Daybreak comes in the morning as the new light of the rising sun dispels darkness. At daybreak, the dark shadows and gray areas of the Bride’s life disappear.

She refuses Him. She refuses His command to arise, and in verse 17, she says, “...until the day breaks, until the shadows flee away, until the new light of dawn comes.” That is, I am still in the dark time with the gray areas, the shadows. The little foxes are there. I have not broken through yet into the light in these areas. She tells Him this little word here, “Turn.” She says, “Turn my Beloved, go.” That is, You go jump on the mountains and leap on them without me right now.

So this is a painful refusal. Just to end it right here is like “ugh.” Good news, do not go into despair. She recovers in Song of Solomon 3; partially she rises up. In Song of Solomon 4, she fully rises up, and they live happily ever after, so the story ends really well.

I want to invite you to stand first before the Lord. Let’s just get in a posture where we are going to talk to Him for just a moment here. The Lord is challenging some of you; you are in a season where He is giving you the big challenge. Again those challenges only come every now and then, a new assignment or an additional assignment or a new way related to your lifestyle, your time, your money, your relational style, the way you carry your life.

To others of you, He is talking about the little foxes. He is saying, “If you will bring those little foxes under My leadership, together we will conquer them. We will conquer those little nickel and dime compromises.”

So I want us to talk to the Lord. We know those little foxes, what they are, but it is those big challenges. Maybe some of you are not in a season of challenge right now, but you will be in the next year or two probably. So I want us to respond to the Lord even before we begin to worship. I want us just to talk to the Lord for a moment and say, “Lord, I want to be Yours in this.” Ask Him what that challenge is or what those foxes are in your life. Just take about sixty seconds and identify one or two of them. I’m saying, do not just hear this and say, “Well, that is a nice interpretation of that love song.” Let’s really apply this.

Lord, here I am. I ask You, Lord, catch the little foxes. Lord, in my life I ask You to catch the little foxes. Lord, I tell You that yes, I will go to the mountain with You, and I am not going to draw back in fear because I am Yours and You are mine. You are my Beloved, even in my weakness. You are my Beloved. You are my Beloved One.

Here is what the Lord says to you, in the midst of the struggle. He says, “Let Me hear your voice, for your voice is sweet. Do not draw back! Let Me see your face. Come in My presence, for your face is lovely. Yes, you are weak, you are immature, but you are lovely to Me. Let Me hear your voice.”

So let Him hear your voice. Even just that prayer ascending from your heart. You do not have to say it out loud. You can. You do not have to, but talk to Him because the Lord says, “Do not retreat. Do not retreat in shame.

Do not retreat in shame, but be confident as you cry out for My help. Let's enjoy this journey together even when I bring you through the wrestle of your own fears."