THE SONG OF SOLOMON

The King Whose Love Never Fails

Song of Solomon, Unfiltered

For teens who think they've heard it all

BILL McLEOD

Papa Bill Books

THE OLD TESTAMENT FOR TEENS

The King Whose Love Never Fails: The Song of Solomon, Unfiltered

Part of The Old Testament for Teens series.

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In the author's own text, pronouns referring to God the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit are capitalized for reverence. Scripture quotations follow the WEB Protestant Edition exactly, including its capitalization.

AI Disclosure. This book was written by Bill McLeod with the assistance of artificial intelligence tools for drafting, research, and editing. All content was reviewed and approved by the author, who takes full responsibility for it. Readers are encouraged to open the Scriptures and study them for themselves.

A WORD TO THE READER

Before You Start

Here's something that surprises a lot of people: there's a love song in the Bible. Not a hymn, not a prayer, not a list of rules. A real love song, full of longing, delight, nervousness, missing someone, finding them again, and promising to be faithful forever.

Some people feel a little awkward about that. Isn't the Bible supposed to be serious and spiritual? But the God who made the stars also made hearts that skip a beat. Love, attraction, and romance aren't embarrassing accidents. They're His idea. And because they're powerful, He cares about how we handle them.

So this book is going to talk honestly and respectfully about love: what it is, why it's worth waiting for, how to treat people well, how to spot a relationship that isn't healthy, and why the greatest love story of all isn't one you have to wait for. It's one you can step into right now.

Let's go.

How This Book Works

This book walks through the Song of Solomon in five chapters: why a love song is in the Bible (Song of Songs 1), don't awaken love before its time (2–3:5), the wedding and building each other up (3:6–5:1), when love gets tested (5:2–7:13), and love as strong as death (8).

Before chapter 1, a section called Setting the Scene explains the book's names, how Jews and Christians have read it, and how its

ancient nature pictures work. Read it first, because some of the images make a lot more sense once you know what they meant.

Each chapter ends with a Key Verse quoted word for word from the World English Bible (WEB), Protestant Edition, a public-domain modern translation used for every Scripture quotation in this book (Scripture is quoted exactly as the WEB prints it; in the rest of the book, pronouns for God are capitalized out of reverence); Real Talk questions to think through alone or talk over with a friend, parent, or leader; and a Try This challenge.

On questions where sincere Christians disagree, such as how literally or symbolically to read the Song, I'll lay out the main views fairly and leave the decision to you, your family, and your church. This book quotes the Song in places and explains it mostly in my own words, so keep a Bible open next to it. Don't take my word for it. Take His.

FOR THE ADULTS

A Note for Parents and Youth Leaders

Thank you for putting this book in a teenager's hands. It's the twenty-second book in The Old Testament for Teens, a companion to the New Testament for Teens series, written for readers who can smell a sermon coming a mile away. I've tried to write honestly, directly, with some warmth and humor, and with real respect for what these readers can handle.

The Song of Solomon is a unique book, a love poem that celebrates romance and marriage. This book handles it tastefully and age-appropriately. It never describes anything graphic, and it explains the Song's poetic images in general terms. Its goal is to help teens see love, attraction, and faithfulness as good gifts from God, without shame and without pressure.

The book gives honest, non-shaming guidance on boundaries, waiting, and respect, built around the Song's three-time refrain about not awakening love before its time. It includes a Real Talk box on body image and self-worth, and a safety box that explains the difference between healthy and controlling or abusive relationships and lists trusted adults, Love Is Respect (1-866-331-9474), RAINN (1-800-656-4673), 988, and 911.

The opening section fairly presents the main ways Jews and Christians have read the Song: as a literal love song celebrating marriage, as an allegory of God's love for His people or Christ's love

for the church, or as both. The closing section, Where This Points, shows how the New Testament presents Jesus as the Bridegroom who laid down His life for His people, while respecting that Jewish readers treasure the Song in their own rich ways, reading it each year at Passover. Wherever Scripture is quoted directly, the wording is from the World English Bible (WEB), Protestant Edition, a public-domain translation.

The Real Talk questions are designed for discussion. Some readers may want to talk them through with a parent or a trusted leader. Don't rush to the right answer. Let them think. Values that have been thought through tend to last.

My prayer is that every reader will see love as God's good gift, will treat others with honor, and will know the love that many waters can't quench.

Grace and peace,

Bill McLeod

Papa Bill Books

BEFORE YOU OPEN THE BOOK

Setting the Scene

What Kind of Book Is This?

The Song of Solomon is a love poem, or maybe a collection of love poems, written mostly as a conversation between a young woman and the man she loves, with a group of friends called the daughters of Jerusalem chiming in. Some translations, including the WEB, even add little labels like Beloved, Lover, and Friends to show who is speaking. It's poetry, not a story told in order, so it jumps around in time, moves between dreams and real life, and repeats ideas like a song repeats its chorus. It never mentions the law, the temple, or prayer, and God's name appears only once, near the very end. And yet it's one of the most treasured books in Scripture.

What's in a Name?

The book's first line calls it the Song of songs, which is Solomon's. In Hebrew, saying something that way, like holy of holies or king of kings, means the greatest of its kind, so the title means the best song ever. That's why the WEB calls it the Song of Songs, while many other Bibles call it the Song of Solomon. Both names refer to the same book. Solomon wrote over a thousand songs, according to 1 Kings, and tradition has linked this one to him. Some scholars think the phrase means the song is dedicated to Solomon, or written in his style, or about him, rather than by him. In this book, I'll use both names, and Scripture references will follow the WEB's name, Song of Songs.

How Have People Read It?

For most of history, many Jewish and Christian readers read the Song mainly as an allegory, a picture of something bigger. Jewish teachers saw in it the love between God and Israel. Christian writers from the early church through the Reformation often saw Christ's love for the church, or for the believer's soul. Many modern readers, including many Christians, read it first as a literal love song that celebrates romantic love and marriage as God's good gift, pointing out that the Bible elsewhere celebrates marriage and that poetry about real human love is worth having in Scripture. A large number of readers today say both: it's a real love song, and because the Bible calls God's relationship with His people a marriage, human love at its best points to God's love. This book reads it that way, while respecting each view.

Nature Metaphors

The Song is full of images from nature and ancient life: gazelles, doves, lilies, vineyards, gardens, spices, fruit, mountains, and towers. To modern ears, some sound funny. If someone told you your hair looked like a flock of goats, you'd probably be confused. But in ancient Israel, these were compliments. A flock of black goats streaming down a hillside in the sun was beautiful. Doves stood for gentleness and loyalty. Towers stood for strength and dignity. Gardens and vineyards were pictures of delight, beauty, and something precious that belongs to someone. The poet isn't giving a scientific description. He's saying, You remind me of the most beautiful things I know. When you read the Song, ask what feeling each picture creates, not what it would look like literally.

Why It Matters for You

The Song shows that love and attraction are good, that faithfulness is beautiful, that people should be treated with honor, and that love is worth protecting and waiting for. In a culture that often treats love as either cheap or confusing, that's a breath of fresh air.

The Map

Chapter 1 (Song of Songs 1): Why a love song is in the Bible.

Chapter 2 (Song of Songs 2–3:5): Don't awaken love before its time.

Chapter 3 (Song of Songs 3:6–5:1): The wedding and building each other up.

Chapter 4 (Song of Songs 5:2–7:13): When love gets tested.

Chapter 5 (Song of Songs 8): Love as strong as death.

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CHAPTER 1

Why a Love Song Is in the Bible

Song of Songs 1

Imagine opening your Bible, flipping past Ecclesiastes, and landing on a page where a young woman is talking about how much she misses the guy she loves. That's how the Song of Solomon begins. No introduction about kings or prophets. Just a title, and then a heart that's full.

The very first line tells you what kind of book this is. "The Song of songs, which is Solomon's." The greatest song. And what is it about? Love.

Right away, the young woman says that his love is better than wine, and that even his name is like perfume poured out. In other words, just thinking about him makes the whole room feel different. If you've ever had a crush, you probably know a little of that feeling. Your heart beats faster when you see a certain name on your phone. You replay a conversation in your head. You notice everything about a person.

> BACKGROUND CHECK **God's Name in the Song**
>
> The Song of Solomon is one of only two books in the Bible, along with Esther, that hardly mentions God directly. His name appears just once, near the end, in a phrase about love being like a flame of the LORD. Some early readers wondered whether a love song belonged in Scripture at all. Around the end of the first century, a famous rabbi named Akiva answered that all the writings

are holy, but the Song of Songs is the holy of holies. Jews and Christians alike have recognized it as God's word, a book that shows His fingerprints on one of the most powerful parts of human life.

So why is a love song in the Bible? Because God created love. On the very first pages of Scripture, God makes a man and a woman and says, "It is not good for the man to be alone." He brings them together, and the man practically writes a poem when he sees her. Genesis says that "they will be one flesh," and that the first couple "were both naked, and they were not ashamed." Before sin entered the world, love between a husband and wife was pure, joyful, and free of shame.

The Song takes us back toward that garden. It celebrates attraction, romance, friendship, and faithfulness as good gifts from a good God. It doesn't treat love as dirty or embarrassing. It also doesn't treat it as cheap or casual. It treats it as precious.

REAL TALK **Is It Okay to Like Someone?**

Some teens feel guilty for having crushes, as if being attracted to someone were wrong. It isn't. God made you with a heart that can be drawn to another person, and that's part of growing up. Liking someone isn't sin. What matters is what you do with those feelings: whether you treat the other person with respect, whether you keep your own values, and whether you let God guide your heart. It's also completely okay if you're not interested in dating right now, or haven't had a crush. Everyone grows at a different pace, and your worth has nothing to do with your relationship status.

Then the young woman says something that surprises a lot of readers. "I am dark, but lovely, you daughters of Jerusalem, like Kedar's tents, like Solomon's curtains." She continues, "Don't stare at me because I am dark, because the sun has scorched me." Her brothers had been angry with her and had made her work outside in

the vineyards, and the sun had darkened her skin. In a culture where the city girls might have looked down on her for working outside, she felt self-conscious.

But notice what she says. Not just dark. Dark and lovely. She's aware that some people might judge her appearance, but she also knows she's beautiful. Kedar's tents were made of black goat hair, a familiar sight in the desert. Solomon's curtains were rich and royal. She is saying, You might see something ordinary, but I'm beautiful and precious.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Dark and Lovely**

In ancient Israel, people who worked outdoors, like farmers and shepherds, were usually tanned by the sun, while wealthy city people often stayed indoors. So the young woman's comment is most likely about her life of hard outdoor work and the way others might judge her for it. Her words have meant a lot to readers in many cultures, including many Black Christians and others who have faced prejudice about their skin. The Bible never treats any skin color as less beautiful than another. Every person is made in God's image.

REAL TALK **Your Body and Your Worth**

A lot of teenagers struggle with how they look. Maybe it's your skin, your weight, your height, your acne, your hair, or the way your body is changing. Social media can make it worse, with filtered faces and edited bodies that aren't even real. If you've ever stood in front of the mirror and felt like you didn't measure up, you're not alone. The young woman in the Song felt that way too. But she also said, I am lovely. God says the same about you. You are fearfully and wonderfully made, as Psalm 139 says. When God chose David to be king, He said, "Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart." Take care of your body as a gift, but don't let a mirror or a feed decide your worth. If you're struggling with an eating disorder, harming yourself, or thoughts that you'd be better off gone, please talk to a parent, counselor, or doctor, or call or text 988. You are worth caring for.

As the chapter goes on, the young woman asks where she can find her beloved, who is a shepherd, and he answers playfully. Then they take turns giving each other compliments. He tells her she is beautiful and that her eyes are like doves. She tells him that he is handsome and delightful. They talk about sitting together under the trees, with the cedar beams over them like the roof of a house.

That back-and-forth is one of the sweetest parts of the Song. They aren't trying to impress each other or compete. They're delighting in each other. Each one makes the other feel seen and valued.

> **REAL TALK** **Words That Build Up**
>
> Notice that the couple in the Song keeps speaking kind, honoring words to each other. Healthy love does that. It notices what's good in the other person and says it out loud. Unhealthy relationships often do the opposite: insults disguised as jokes, constant criticism, or comments that make someone feel small. You don't need to be dating to practice this. Encourage your friends. Tell your siblings what you appreciate about them. Thank your parents. Learning to build people up with your words now will make every relationship in your life better, including a future marriage if God gives you one.

The first chapter also shows that love isn't only about feelings. The two of them are friends. They talk, laugh, and enjoy being together. Later in the book, she'll say of him, "This is my beloved, and this is my friend." Friendship is the foundation of lasting love. Attraction may start a relationship, but friendship, respect, and faithfulness are what keep it going.

So why is there a love song in the Bible? Because God isn't embarrassed by love. He invented it. He wants us to know that it's good, that it's powerful, and that it deserves to be treated with care. And, as we'll see later, He wants us to see in human love a picture of an even greater love, His love for us.

REAL TALK **Comparison and the Daughters of Jerusalem**

The young woman felt the daughters of Jerusalem staring at her. Today, the staring often happens through a screen. You see someone's highlight reel and compare it to your behind-the-scenes life. You count likes and wonder why you got fewer. You see couples posting about each other and feel left out. Comparison can make you feel unlovable, but it's built on a lie, because almost nobody posts their real, ordinary, messy life. If scrolling makes you feel worse about yourself, it might be time to take a break, mute certain accounts, or set time limits. Spend more time with people face to face. And remember that God's opinion of you doesn't change with your feed.

It's worth noticing something about how the Song talks. The young woman speaks first, and she speaks the most. In many ancient cultures, women's voices were rarely heard in public, and love poetry was often written by men about women. But in the Song, the young woman's feelings, hopes, and words take center stage. She isn't a silent prize to be won. She is a full person with her own voice, opinions, and dignity. The Song honors both the man and the woman as equals in love.

That matters for how you treat people. Whether you're a guy or a girl, the Song invites you to see others as whole people, not just bodies, trophies, or status symbols. Someone you like has their own thoughts, fears, dreams, and relationship with God. Love that is worthy of the name sees all of that and honors it.

The Song also reminds us that love is a big part of being human, but it isn't the only part. Some people will marry and some won't. Jesus never married, and neither did Paul, and both lived full, meaningful lives. Paul even said singleness could be a gift that allowed him to serve God with fewer distractions. If God leads you to marriage someday, wonderful. If He doesn't, you aren't missing out on the

most important love. The deepest love of all, as we'll see at the end of this book, is available to everyone.

KEY VERSE

I am dark, but lovely, you daughters of Jerusalem, like Kedar's tents, like Solomon's curtains.

Song of Songs 1:5 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. Why do you think some people are surprised that there's a love song in the Bible?
2. What does it tell you about God that He created love and attraction?
3. Why do you think the young woman says she is both dark and lovely? How does that apply to how you see yourself?
4. How can you use your words to build people up this week?

TRY THIS *Write down three things you like about yourself that have nothing to do with your appearance. Then write one sentence thanking God for making you on purpose.*

CHAPTER 2

Don’t Awaken Love Before Its Time

Song of Songs 2–3:5

Chapter 2 opens with the young woman describing herself humbly. “I am a rose of Sharon, a lily of the valleys.” Sharon was a coastal plain covered in wildflowers. She might be saying, I’m just one ordinary flower among many. But her beloved answers right away. “As a lily among thorns, so is my love among the daughters.” To him, she stands out from everyone.

She answers back that he is like an apple tree in a forest, a tree that gives shade and sweet fruit. “His banner over me is love.” In ancient times, armies marched under banners to show who they belonged to. She’s saying that his love is like a flag over her, telling everyone that she belongs with him and is safe with him.

Then comes something important. In the middle of all this romance, the young woman stops and speaks to her friends, the daughters of Jerusalem. “I adjure you, daughters of Jerusalem, by the roes, or by the hinds of the field, that you not stir up, nor awaken love, until it so desires.”

BACKGROUND CHECK **The Refrain**

This line appears three times in the Song, in 2:7, 3:5, and 8:4, almost like a chorus. To adjure someone means to ask them to make a serious promise. Roes and hinds are gazelles and deer, gentle, beautiful animals that are easily startled, perhaps a picture of how delicate love is. The young woman, who knows how powerful love is, is warning her friends: don't rush it. Don't try to force romance or stir up desire before the right time. Love isn't something to play with. It's something to protect.

Notice who says this. It isn't a strict parent or a grumpy teacher. It's the young woman herself, the one who is in love. She isn't against love. She's for it. And because she understands how strong it is, she knows it shouldn't be awakened too soon.

What does it mean to awaken love before its time? Think of love and desire like a fire. In a fireplace, fire is wonderful. It warms the whole house. But a fire in the wrong place can burn the house down. God designed the deepest kind of love, including physical intimacy, to be enjoyed within the safety of a lifelong commitment, marriage. Awakening it too early is like lighting a fire before you've built the fireplace.

REAL TALK **Boundaries, Waiting, and Respect**

The world often tells teenagers that everyone is doing it, that waiting is old-fashioned, and that there's something wrong with you if you're not in a relationship. The Song says something different: love is worth waiting for. Waiting isn't about being afraid of love or ashamed of your body. It's about protecting something precious. Here are a few wise ideas. Decide your boundaries ahead of time, before you're in a heated moment. Avoid situations that make it harder to keep them, like being alone together late at night. Group hangouts are a great way to get to know someone. Talk to a parent or trusted adult about your questions. And remember that respect

goes both ways. No one should ever pressure you, and you should never pressure anyone. A person who truly loves you will respect your no.

REAL TALK **If You've Already Crossed a Line**

Maybe you're reading this and thinking, It's too late for me. If you've made choices you regret, please hear this: God's grace is bigger than your past. Jesus didn't come for people who have it all together. He came for people who need forgiveness, which is all of us. You can bring anything to Him. You can make a fresh start today, and you are not damaged goods. Talking with a pastor, counselor, or trusted adult can help. And if something happened to you that you didn't choose, if someone pressured or forced you, that is not your fault, and it is not your sin. Please tell a trusted adult, or contact RAINN at 1-800-656-4673 to talk with someone confidentially.

Next, the young woman hears her beloved coming. "The voice of my beloved! Behold, he comes, leaping on the mountains, skipping on the hills." He's like a gazelle, running to see her. He calls to her to come away, because winter is past and spring has arrived. Flowers are blooming, birds are singing, and the fig trees and vines are budding.

The springtime imagery fits. Spring is a time of new life, new beginnings, and excitement. It's also a reminder that every season has its time, just like Ecclesiastes said. Spring can't be rushed. It comes when it comes.

Then comes an interesting line. "Catch for us the foxes, the little foxes that plunder the vineyards; for our vineyards are in blossom."

BACKGROUND CHECK **The Little Foxes**

In ancient Israel, foxes were a real problem for vineyard owners. They dug holes, chewed on vines, and ate the grapes. Little foxes could slip through the walls and do damage before anyone noticed. In the Song, the vineyard in blossom is a picture of a growing love relationship. The little foxes are small

problems that can ruin it if they aren't caught early: little lies, jealousy, unkind words, pride, selfishness, or a habit of not listening. Big problems in a relationship often start as little foxes that no one bothered to deal with.

The little foxes apply to more than romance. Friendships, family relationships, and even your relationship with God can be damaged by small things you ignore. A little resentment. A little dishonesty. A little neglect. Catching the foxes early is a sign of wisdom and love.

Then she says, "My beloved is mine, and I am his." It's a picture of mutual belonging. Not one person owning or controlling the other, but two people giving themselves to each other freely.

REAL TALK **Dating Pressure**

Some teens feel like they're behind if they haven't dated yet. Others feel pressure from friends to get together with someone, or to go further than they want to. Here's the truth: there's no deadline. Many wise people didn't date at all in high school, and they're glad. If you do date, it's wise to involve your parents, to keep things public and group-centered, and to ask yourself whether the relationship is helping both of you grow closer to God and become better people. And if a friend is being pressured, stand with them. Saying, You don't have to do anything you don't want to, can be a gift.

REAL TALK **Talking With Your Parents**

Talking with your parents about crushes, dating, or love might feel awkward. That's normal. But your parents or guardians have been through it, and most of them want to help, not embarrass you. Try starting small: ask them how they met, or what they wish they'd known at your age. If talking with your parents isn't possible or safe, find another trusted adult, like a youth leader, a relative, or a school counselor. You don't have to figure out love on your own.

Chapter 3 begins with what sounds like a dream. At night, she searches for her beloved and can't find him. She goes out into the city, asks the watchmen, and finally finds him. She holds on to him

and won't let go. It's a picture of longing, the ache of missing someone. And then, once again, she repeats the refrain: don't stir up or awaken love until it so desires.

It's as if, every time the Song reaches a moment of strong emotion, it pauses to remind us: love is powerful. Handle it with care.

> **REAL TALK** **Why Wait?**
>
> Some people think waiting is just an arbitrary rule. But there are good reasons behind it. Love and physical intimacy create deep emotional bonds, and those bonds are meant to be protected by commitment. When they're awakened too early, it can lead to heartbreak, confusion, regret, pressure, and sometimes real physical consequences. Teen relationships also tend to be short, and that's normal, because you're still growing and figuring out who you are. Waiting gives you time to become the person you want to be before you give your heart away completely. It isn't about missing out. It's about saving the best for the right time and the right person.

Waiting doesn't mean you have to pretend you have no feelings. It means you choose what to do with them. You can admit you like someone. You can pray about it. You can talk with a parent or mentor. You can be friends. You can enjoy group activities. You can focus on growing as a person. And you can trust that God knows what He's doing with your story, even if it feels slow.

Paul wrote to the Thessalonians that God wants each person to learn to control their own body "in sanctification and honor." Notice the word honor. God's guidelines for love aren't about shame. They're about honor, treating yourself and others as precious, because they are.

KEY VERSE

I adjure you, daughters of Jerusalem, by the roes, or by the hinds of the field, that you not stir up, nor awaken love, until it so desires.

Song of Songs 2:7 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. Why do you think the young woman, who is in love, is the one who warns against awakening love too soon?
2. What does it look like to set healthy boundaries before you're in a relationship?
3. What are some little foxes that can ruin a relationship or friendship?
4. Why is it important that love includes respect for the other person's no?

TRY THIS *Write down two or three boundaries you want to keep in future relationships, and share them with a parent or trusted adult who can encourage you.*

CHAPTER 3

The Wedding and Building Each Other Up

Song of Songs 3:6–5:1

In the middle of the Song, a parade appears on the horizon. "Who is this who comes up from the wilderness like pillars of smoke, perfumed with myrrh and frankincense, with all spices of the merchant?" It's a royal wedding procession. Sixty mighty warriors surround the carriage, which King Solomon made from the wood of Lebanon, with silver posts, a gold base, and a purple seat.

Then the friends are invited to come and see. "Go out, you daughters of Zion, and see King Solomon, with the crown with which his mother has crowned him, in the day of his weddings, in the day of the gladness of his heart."

BACKGROUND CHECK **Ancient Weddings**

In ancient Israel, weddings were huge community celebrations. The groom and his friends would often go in a procession to bring the bride to his home, with music, dancing, and torches. The celebration could last a whole week, with feasting and joy. Jesus performed His first miracle at a wedding in Cana, turning water into wine so the party could continue. Many readers think that the wedding in the Song is the center of the whole book, with the courtship before it and married life after it. Whether the groom is literally Solomon or a

young shepherd pictured as a king for the day, the point is that this is the happiest day of his life.

Notice the phrase the gladness of his heart. Marriage isn't presented as a cage or a burden. It's presented as joy. In a culture where some people make fun of marriage or say it doesn't matter, the Song celebrates it as one of the happiest things in life.

Then, in chapter 4, the groom speaks to his bride. He says, "Behold, you are beautiful, my love. Behold, you are beautiful." He goes on to describe her using a long series of nature pictures, the kind of poem called a wasf in Arabic love poetry. Her eyes are like doves. Her hair is like a flock of goats coming down a mountain. Her smile is like a flock of freshly washed sheep. Her neck is like a tall tower with shields hanging on it.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Ancient Compliments**

To modern readers, these compliments can sound hilarious. Goats? Sheep? A tower? But to people in ancient Israel, they were beautiful. Imagine a herd of black goats flowing down a sunlit hillside, their dark hair shimmering as they move. That's a picture of flowing, beautiful hair. Sheep coming up from the washing were bright white and perfectly matched, every one with a twin, so none were missing. That's a picture of a bright, complete smile. A tower decorated with shields stood tall and strong. That's a picture of dignity and confidence. The poet is using the most beautiful things he knows to describe the person he loves. If he lived today, he might compare her to a sunset, a starry sky, or a favorite song.

Then he says something tender. "You are all beautiful, my love. There is no spot in you." He's not saying she's literally flawless. He's saying that, to him, she is completely lovely. Love sees the beauty in a person and treasures it.

He also calls her "my sister, my bride." That might sound strange today, but in ancient love poetry, calling your beloved sister was a way of saying, You're family to me. You're my closest companion. It's a word of deep friendship and belonging.

> **REAL TALK** **Building Each Other Up**
>
> The groom in the Song spends a long time telling his bride what he loves about her. That's a great picture of what healthy love does. It builds the other person up. It notices and celebrates. It makes them feel safe and treasured. Compare that to relationships where someone constantly criticizes, compares, or pressures. You can practice building people up right now, in your friendships and your family. And when you're older, look for someone who does that for you, and be that kind of person for them. Love that tears down isn't love at all.

Next, the groom describes his bride as "a locked up garden; a locked up spring, a sealed fountain." In the ancient world, a locked garden was a private place, beautiful and precious, open only to the one who had the key. Many readers see this as a picture of the purity and faithfulness she has saved for her husband. She belongs to him alone, and he to her alone.

> **REAL TALK** **You Are Not an Object**
>
> The Song never treats people as objects to be used. The groom and bride honor each other, wait for each other, and give themselves freely. That's very different from how love is often shown online, where people are treated like products to be judged, rated, and used. Pornography, in particular, teaches people to see others as objects rather than as image bearers of God, and it can be addictive and harmful. If you've encountered it, you're not alone, and there's no shame in asking for help. Talk to a parent, pastor, or counselor. God designed love to be about honor, commitment, and real connection, not consumption.

The section ends with a celebration. The bride invites her groom into her garden, and he says he has come. Then the friends cheer them on, telling them to eat and drink and enjoy their love. It's a joyful, tasteful picture of a wedding night, described entirely in poetic images of gardens, spices, honey, and wine.

Notice that the friends approve. They're celebrating. This isn't something secret or shameful. It's the joyful beginning of a lifelong commitment, blessed by the community and by God.

That's the big picture the Song paints. Love is good. Attraction is good. Waiting is wise. And within marriage, God's gift of love can be enjoyed freely and joyfully, without shame. The bride and groom in the Song aren't rushing, using, or pressuring each other. They're honoring each other, and that makes all the difference.

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **The Garden and Eden**
>
> Gardens show up again and again in the Song: vineyards, orchards, spices, fountains, and flowers. Many readers think this isn't an accident. The Bible's story begins in a garden, Eden, where the first man and woman lived together without shame in God's presence. After sin, they were sent out of the garden. The Song's garden imagery seems to echo that first garden, a picture of love as God intended it, restored. And the Bible's story ends in a garden city, where a river of life flows and the tree of life grows. Love, at its best, is a little taste of paradise.

One more detail in this section is worth noticing. Five times in chapters 4 and 5, the groom calls her my bride. The word shows up only in this part of the Song, after the wedding procession. That's one reason many readers believe the poem places the celebration of physical love within marriage. The covenant comes first, and then the celebration. That order isn't an arbitrary rule. It's a picture of safety. Love flourishes best where it's protected by a promise.

It's also worth saying that marriages in real life aren't always like the Song. Some marriages are hard, and some end in divorce. If your parents are divorced or your family has been through a painful breakup, the Song isn't meant to make you feel ashamed or hopeless. God's love can heal broken stories, and your own future isn't decided by your family's past. Many people who grew up in hard homes go on to build loving, faithful families of their own.

> **REAL TALK** **Practicing Love Now**
>
> You don't have to wait until you're married to learn how to love well. In fact, the habits you build now will shape every relationship you ever have. Practice patience with your siblings. Practice keeping your promises to friends. Practice honesty with your parents. Practice apologizing when you're wrong, and forgiving when someone else is. Practice noticing the person who is left out. Paul wrote, "In love of the brothers be tenderly affectionate to one another; in honor prefer one another." That's a training ground for faithful love, and it starts today.

KEY VERSE

You are all beautiful, my love. There is no spot in you.

Song of Songs 4:7 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. Why do you think the Song presents marriage as a time of joy rather than a burden?
2. Which ancient compliment in chapter 4 do you think is the funniest? What modern image would you use instead?
3. What are some ways you can build others up with your words?
4. How is the love in the Song different from the way love is often shown in media?

TRY THIS *Write a note to someone in your family telling them three specific things you appreciate about them, and give it to them this week.*

CHAPTER 4

When Love Gets Tested

Song of Songs 5:2–7:13

Every love story has hard moments, and the Song is honest about that. Right after the joy of the wedding, chapter 5 describes a misunderstanding.

It's night. The young woman is half asleep. "I was asleep, but my heart was awake. It is the voice of my beloved who knocks." He's at the door, asking her to let him in. His hair is wet with the night dew. But she hesitates. She's already in bed. She's comfortable. She says, in effect, I've already gotten ready for bed. Do I really have to get up?

By the time she gets up and opens the door, he's gone. "I opened to my beloved; but my beloved left, and had gone away. My heart went out when he spoke. I looked for him, but I didn't find him. I called him, but he didn't answer."

> BACKGROUND CHECK **Dream or Reality?**
>
> Many interpreters think this scene, like the one in chapter 3, is a dream or a dreamlike poem. Others read it as a real event. Either way, it captures something true about relationships: sometimes one person reaches out and the other isn't ready, and then the moment slips away. Readers who see the Song as a picture of God and His people often compare this scene to Revelation 3:20, where Jesus says He stands at the door and knocks. Both

readings point to the same lesson: when love knocks, don't wait too long to answer.

The scene gets worse. As she searches for him in the city at night, the watchmen find her and treat her harshly, beating her and taking her cloak. It's a painful moment in the poem, a picture of how lost and vulnerable she feels. Commentators note that, unlike the watchmen in chapter 3, these guards are cruel. The Song doesn't hide that sometimes the world is not kind.

REAL TALK **When Someone Hurts You**

If anyone has ever physically hurt you, threatened you, or touched you without your permission, that is never okay, and it is never your fault. You deserve to be safe. Please tell a trusted adult, like a parent, school counselor, teacher, or pastor. You can contact RAINN at 1-800-656-4673 any time to talk with someone confidentially. If you're in danger right now, call 911. And if you're feeling hopeless or thinking about hurting yourself, call or text 988. Speaking up is brave, and help is available.

Still, she doesn't give up. She asks her friends to help her find him and tell him that she's faint with love. They ask her, essentially, What's so special about him? And she answers with a beautiful poem describing him. He's radiant and strong, the best among ten thousand. She describes his head, his eyes, his hands, and his strength using pictures of gold, doves, jewels, marble, and cedars. And then she says, "This is my beloved, and this is my friend."

When her friends ask where he's gone, she realizes she knows. He's gone down to his garden. And she says again, with confidence, "I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine." The misunderstanding hasn't broken their bond.

REAL TALK **Handling Conflict Well**

Every relationship has misunderstandings, whether it's with a friend, a sibling, a parent, or someday a spouse. Sometimes one person reaches out and the other is distracted or tired. Sometimes feelings get hurt. The Song shows a healthy response: she realizes she was wrong, she goes looking for him, and she remembers all the good things about him. Here are some wise ways to handle conflict. Don't let it fester. Go to the person and talk. Own your part, even if it's small. Listen more than you talk. Remember what you appreciate about the other person. And forgive. Healthy relationships aren't relationships with no conflict. They're relationships where conflict leads to understanding instead of breaking apart.

In chapter 6, the beloved reappears, and there's no hint of anger or punishment. He tells her again that she's beautiful, "awesome as an army with banners." He says that even among queens and princesses, she is unique, his one and only. Their reconciliation is gentle and complete.

That's a picture of what reconciliation can look like. He doesn't hold the moment at the door over her head. He doesn't make her earn her way back. He welcomes her with words of love.

Chapter 7 continues with another poem of praise, this time starting from her feet and moving up. Then the young woman speaks, full of confidence. "I am my beloved's. His desire is toward me." Notice how her words have grown. Back in chapter 2, she said, My beloved is mine, and I am his. Later, I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine. Now she simply rests in belonging to him and in his desire for her. She's secure.

BACKGROUND CHECK **A Reversal of Genesis**

Some scholars notice that the phrase his desire is toward me in 7:10 echoes Genesis 3:16. After the fall, God told Eve that her desire would be toward her husband, and he would rule over her, a description of how sin would twist

relationships between men and women into struggles for control. In the Song, it's reversed. The husband's desire is toward his wife, and there's no ruling or control, only mutual love. Many readers see the Song as a picture of love being restored toward what God intended in Eden.

The chapter ends with her inviting him to go out into the countryside together, to walk through the vineyards in spring and see whether the vines have budded. It's a peaceful, happy picture of a couple who have come through a hard moment stronger.

REAL TALK **Healthy or Controlling?**

The love in the Song is free, mutual, and respectful. Neither person controls the other. That's an important picture, because some relationships, even among teenagers, become controlling or abusive. Healthy relationships include respect, honesty, trust, kindness, and freedom to have your own friends, opinions, and boundaries. Unhealthy or abusive relationships may include jealousy that feels scary, checking your phone or location, telling you what to wear or who to talk to, isolating you from friends and family, insults, threats, pressure to do things you don't want to do, or any kind of physical harm. Some controlling partners say, I'm only doing this because I love you. That isn't love. Love doesn't control, threaten, or hurt. If something in your relationship feels wrong, please talk to a trusted adult. You can also call Love Is Respect at 1-866-331-9474 or text LOVEIS to 22522, any time. If you've been sexually assaulted, contact RAINN at 1-800-656-4673. If you're in danger, call 911. If you're feeling hopeless, call or text 988.

Paul's famous description of love fits the Song well. "Love is patient and is kind. Love doesn't envy. Love doesn't brag, is not proud, doesn't behave itself inappropriately, doesn't seek its own way, is not provoked, takes no account of evil." That last phrase means love doesn't keep a record of wrongs. The beloved in the Song shows exactly that kind of love when he welcomes her back.

REAL TALK **Jealousy, Good and Bad**

The Song calls love fierce, and some readers wonder whether that means jealousy is good. There's a difference. Healthy commitment means you want to be the only one, and you're faithful to each other. Unhealthy jealousy is suspicious, possessive, and controlling: demanding to see someone's messages, getting angry when they talk to friends, or accusing them without reason. That kind of jealousy comes from insecurity and fear, not love. If you notice it in yourself, talk to someone you trust about where it's coming from. If you notice it in someone you're dating, take it seriously. It often gets worse over time.

The middle of the Song is also a reminder that love takes effort. The young woman's moment of hesitation at the door wasn't a terrible sin. She was just tired and comfortable. But small moments of selfishness and distraction can create distance in any relationship. The cure is attention. Notice the people you love. Make time for them. Put the phone down when they're talking. Show up when it's inconvenient. Those small choices build trust over time.

Another thing to notice is how the friends help. When the young woman can't find her beloved, she asks the daughters of Jerusalem for help, and they ask her good questions that help her remember why she loves him. Good friends do that. They don't feed drama, gossip, or tear down the people you care about. They help you see clearly, remember what matters, and make things right. Be that kind of friend, and look for that kind of friend.

REAL TALK **Breakups and Heartbreak**

Not every relationship ends in reconciliation. Sometimes friendships end, and dating relationships break up. Heartbreak can hurt more than people admit. You might lose sleep, feel embarrassed, struggle to focus, or wonder if something is wrong with you. Those feelings are real, and it's okay to grieve. Give yourself time. Lean on friends and family. Talk to God honestly about

your hurt; the Psalms are full of honest prayers. Avoid checking the other person's social media over and over, which usually makes it worse. And remember that a breakup doesn't decide your worth. If sadness lingers for weeks or turns into hopelessness, talk to a trusted adult or counselor, or call or text 988.

KEY VERSE

I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine. He browses among the lilies.

Song of Songs 6:3 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. Why do you think the Song includes a scene of misunderstanding and searching?
2. What are some healthy ways to handle conflict in a friendship or relationship?
3. What are some warning signs that a relationship is controlling or unhealthy?
4. How does the beloved's response in chapter 6 show what forgiveness looks like?

TRY THIS *Think of a relationship where there's been a misunderstanding. This week, take one step toward making it right, like a kind message, an apology, or a conversation.*

CHAPTER 5

Love as Strong as Death

Song of Songs 8

The final chapter of the Song brings everything together. It starts with the young woman wishing she could show her love openly, without anyone thinking it strange. Then, for the third time, she repeats the refrain to her friends. "I adjure you, daughters of Jerusalem, that you not stir up, nor awaken love, until it so desires."

By now, the refrain is like an old friend. It shows up at the beginning, the middle, and the end. Even after the wedding, after the misunderstanding and the reconciliation, she's still saying the same thing: love is powerful, so don't rush it. That's wisdom for every season.

Then the friends ask, "Who is this who comes up from the wilderness, leaning on her beloved?" Remember the wedding procession in chapter 3, which also came up from the wilderness? Now the couple is walking together, and she's leaning on him. It's a picture of trust and companionship, two people who have grown together and can rely on each other.

And then come the most famous lines in the Song. "Set me as a seal on your heart, as a seal on your arm; for love is strong as death. Jealousy is as cruel as Sheol. Its flashes are flashes of fire, a very flame of the LORD. Many waters can't quench love, neither can

floods drown it. If a man would give all the wealth of his house for love, he would be utterly scorned."

BACKGROUND CHECK **A Seal on Your Heart**

In the ancient world, a seal was a small stamp or carved stone, often worn on a cord around the neck or on a ring, that was pressed into clay or wax to mark ownership or make something official, like a signature. It was one of a person's most precious possessions. When the young woman says, Set me as a seal on your heart, she's saying, Keep me close, as close as the thing you value most. Let everyone know that I belong to you and you belong to me. It's a picture of commitment, the kind of lifelong faithfulness that marriage is meant to be.

Then she explains why. Love is strong as death. Death is the one power no one can defeat. It takes everyone eventually. But love, she says, is just as strong. It holds on. It doesn't let go.

The word jealousy here doesn't mean insecure, possessive suspicion. It means a fierce, passionate commitment that won't share the beloved with a rival. The Bible often calls God jealous in this sense: He loves His people so much that He won't accept them giving their hearts to idols. And then the poem says love's flashes are a very flame of the LORD. This is the only place in the whole Song where God's name appears. The deepest love is like a fire that comes from God Himself.

BACKGROUND CHECK **A Flame of the LORD**

The Hebrew phrase in 8:6 ends with a short form of God's name, Yah, the same short form found in the word hallelujah, which means praise Yah. Some translations render it as a mighty flame or the very flame of God. Many readers see it as the key to the whole Song: true love isn't just a human feeling. It's a spark of God's own love. When people love each other faithfully, they're reflecting the fiery, unquenchable love of the One who made them.

Many waters can't quench love. In the ancient world, the sea and floods were symbols of chaos and destruction. But even all the water in the world can't put out the fire of real love. And it can't be bought. If someone offered all his wealth for love, people would laugh at him. Love isn't for sale. It can only be given.

> **REAL TALK** **Love That Lasts**
>
> Our culture often shows love as a feeling that comes and goes. When the excitement fades, people move on. The Song paints a different picture: love as a lifelong commitment, a seal on the heart, a fire no flood can put out. Feelings are part of love, but they're not all of it. Real love is a choice to stay faithful, to keep showing up, and to keep honoring someone, even when it's hard. You can see that kind of love in couples who have been married for fifty years, in parents who sacrifice for their kids, and in friends who stick with you through everything. Look for it. Learn from it. And someday, if God leads you to marriage, practice it.

Then the Song closes with a few short scenes. The young woman's brothers, remembering when she was a little sister, talk about protecting her until she was ready for marriage. If she is a wall, they say, they'll build silver towers on her. If she's a door, they'll protect her with cedar. She answers proudly that she has been a wall, someone who kept her boundaries and was strong. And in her beloved's eyes, she found peace.

> **REAL TALK** **A Wall, Not a Door**
>
> The brothers' words are a picture of protecting someone young. A wall stands firm. A door swings open to anyone. When the young woman says, I am a wall, she's saying she kept her boundaries and wasn't pushed around. That's a strength, not a weakness. Being a wall means knowing who you are, keeping your values, and not letting others pressure you. It's true for guys and girls alike. And the result in the Song isn't loneliness. It's peace.

Finally, the Song mentions Solomon's huge vineyard, which he rented out for a fortune. The young woman says, in effect, Solomon can keep his thousand pieces of silver. My own vineyard, my love, is mine to give. Love can't be bought, even by a king.

Notice too that the Song's greatest line about love comes right after a picture of trust. She leans on her beloved, and then she asks him to set her as a seal on his heart. Lasting love isn't built on fireworks alone. It's built on trust, the kind that grows when two people keep their promises over and over. Every promise kept is like another strand in a rope that holds them together.

The idea that love is stronger than death has comforted many people who have lost someone they love. When a grandparent dies after decades of marriage, or a friend loses a parent, it can feel like death has won. The Song doesn't pretend death isn't real. It names it as the strongest enemy. But it insists that love is just as strong. Christians believe that's more than poetry. As we'll see in the next section, there is a love that actually defeated death.

The very last line has the young woman calling her beloved to come quickly, like a gazelle on the mountains of spices. The Song doesn't end with a neat conclusion. It ends with longing, an invitation to come. That's a fitting ending for a book that, many believe, points beyond itself to a greater love still to come.

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **Reading the Song at Passover**
>
> In Jewish tradition, the Song of Songs is read each year during Passover, the springtime festival that remembers how God rescued Israel from slavery in Egypt. That might seem like a surprising choice. Why read a love song at a festival about rescue? Because many Jewish readers see the Song as a picture of God's love for Israel, the love that led Him to rescue His people and bring them to Himself, like a bridegroom bringing home his bride. The Song's

> springtime images, with flowers blooming and winter gone, also fit the season of Passover perfectly.

As the Song ends, it's worth stepping back to look at the whole thing. It started with a young woman unsure of herself, worried about being stared at. It ends with her confident, secure, and at peace, leaning on her beloved. Along the way, there was longing, waiting, celebration, misunderstanding, and reconciliation. That's what real love looks like. It's not a perfect fairy tale. It's a story of two people growing in faithfulness over time.

And the refrain stays with us. Don't stir up or awaken love until it so desires. Love is beautiful, powerful, and worth protecting. Whether you're single, dating, or someday married, the Song invites you to treat love as the precious gift it is: with patience, honor, faithfulness, and joy.

KEY VERSE

Set me as a seal on your heart, as a seal on your arm; for love is strong as death. Jealousy is as cruel as Sheol. Its flashes are flashes of fire, a very flame of the LORD. Many waters can't quench love, neither can floods drown it. If a man would give all the wealth of his house for love, he would be utterly scorned.

Song of Songs 8:6–7 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. What do you think it means that love is as strong as death?
2. Why do you think love can't be bought?
3. What examples of lasting, faithful love have you seen in real life?
4. What does it mean to be a wall rather than a door?

TRY THIS *Ask a married couple you respect, like grandparents, parents, or a couple from church, what has helped their love last. Write down their answer and keep it somewhere you'll see it.*

THE END (AND THE BEGINNING)

Where This Points

The Song ends with one of the most powerful descriptions of love ever written: love is strong as death, and many waters can't quench it. Human love at its best gives us a glimpse of that. But even the best human love has limits. People let each other down. Hearts change. And eventually, death separates even the most faithful couples.

Jewish readers treasure the Song as a picture of God's covenant love for Israel and read it every year at Passover, the festival of rescue. Throughout the Old Testament, God describes His relationship with His people as a marriage. Isaiah wrote, "As a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so your God will rejoice over you." The New Testament writers, who were Jewish themselves, saw that picture fulfilled in Jesus. John the Baptist called Jesus the bridegroom. Paul wrote, "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the assembly and gave himself up for her." Jesus' love really is stronger than death. He laid down His life for His people, and then He rose again. Paul wrote that nothing, "neither death, nor life," nor anything else in all creation "will be able to separate us from God's love which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." And the Bible ends with a wedding. In Revelation, a great crowd shouts with a sound "like the voice of many waters," saying, "For the wedding of the Lamb has come." Whether or not you ever marry, you are invited to the greatest love story of all.

Here's what the Bible says about that love, as plainly as I can put it.

1 God made you, and He loves you.

God made you on purpose, and He loves you more than anyone ever could. You are fearfully and wonderfully made.

> *For God so loved the world, that he gave his only born Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life.* **John 3:16 (WEB)**

2 We've all sinned.

We've all turned away from that love to go our own way. The Bible says all of us have sinned.

> *for all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God;* **Romans 3:23 (WEB)**

3 Sin has a real cost.

God is good, so He doesn't shrug off evil. The Bible says its result is death, separation from God forever.

> *For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.* **Romans 6:23 (WEB)**

4 Jesus is the Bridegroom who gave Himself.

Jesus loved His people so much that He laid down His life for them on the cross and rose again, so that His love is stronger than death.

> *In this is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son as the atoning sacrifice for our sins.* **1 John 4:10 (WEB)**

5 You can't earn it. You receive it.

You can't make God love you by being good enough. Salvation isn't a reward. It's a gift you receive by trusting Jesus.

> *for by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, that no one would boast.*
> **Ephesians 2:8–9 (WEB)**

6 Say yes to His love.

Turn from running your own life, and trust Jesus as your Savior and King. Then you can know, not just hope, that you have eternal life.

> *that if you will confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.*
> **Romans 10:9 (WEB)**

So what do you do with that? You don't need perfect words. You can talk to God right now, wherever you are. If it helps, you could pray something like this:

> *God, thank You for loving me before I ever loved You. I've gone my own way and sinned against You, and I can't fix that myself. Thank You that Jesus loved me so much that He laid down His life for me and rose again. Forgive me, and make me Yours. Help me believe that nothing can separate me from Your love. Teach me to treat others with honor, to wait for Your timing, and to love the way You love. I trust Jesus as my Savior, and I want Him to be my King. In Jesus' name, amen.*

If You Just Said Yes

Tell someone. A parent, a youth leader, a pastor, or a Christian friend. Start there.

Read the real thing. Read Song of Songs 8, then Romans 8 and 1 Corinthians 13, two chapters about love that never quits.

Find your people. Get connected to a church where the Bible is taught and Jesus is honored. Ask about being baptized.

Love someone well. Do one kind, honoring thing this week for someone in your family, without being asked.

Not Sure Yet?

Not ready? That's honest, and honesty is a good place to start. Keep asking questions. Keep reading. Just don't settle for "I already know all that."

Because if the Song is right, the love you're longing for is real, and it's stronger than death. And it's already looking for you.

nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing will be able to separate us from God's love which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Romans 8:39 (WEB)