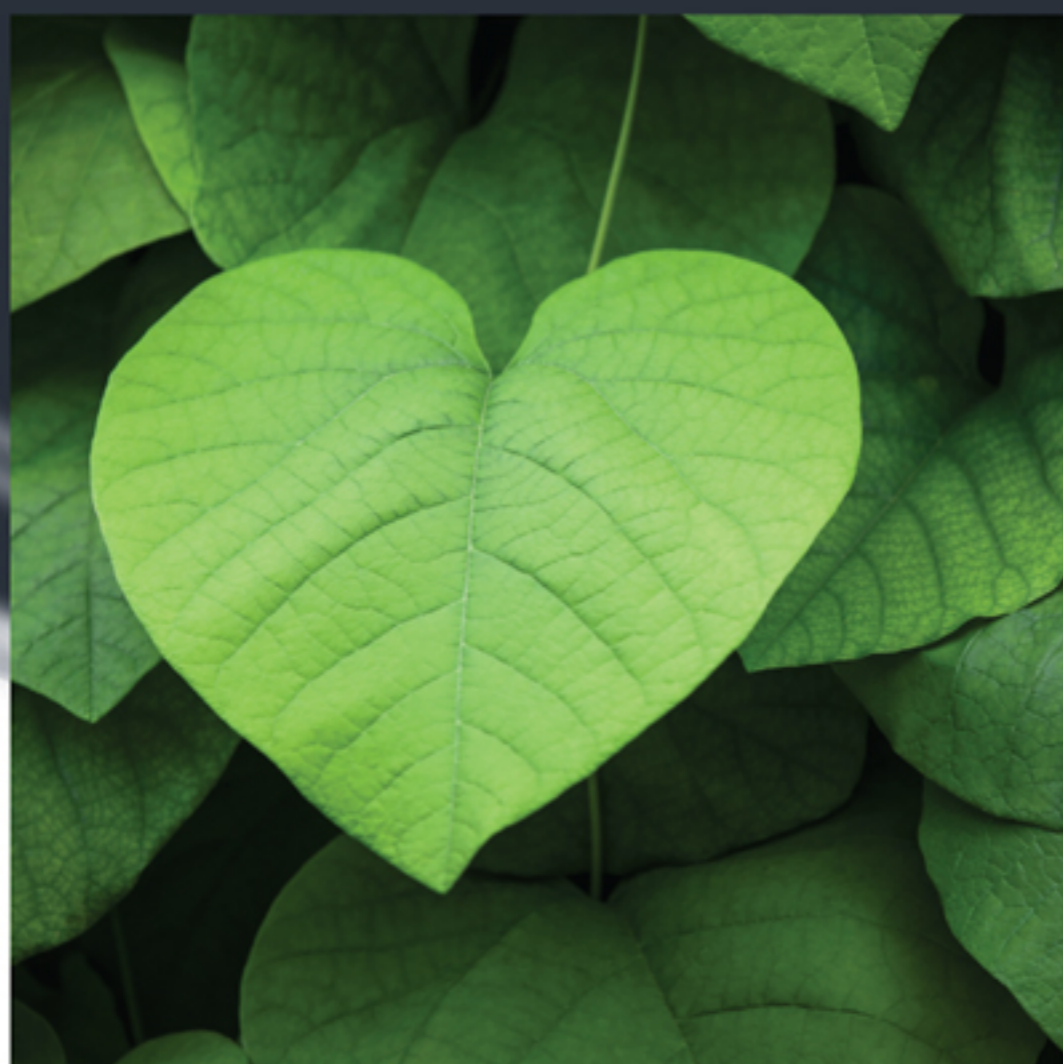


GARDEN OF LOVE



4 INTERACTIVE BIBLE STUDIES FOR
SMALL GROUPS AND INDIVIDUALS



»» CONTENTS

How to make the most of these studies	5
STUDY 1: The best song ever	9
STUDY 2: Let's talk about sex	17
STUDY 3: Love and marriage	25
STUDY 4: The good news about love	33

Garden of Love

© Des Smith 2017. This resource was downloaded from GoThereFor.com and may only be used within the ministry of the licensed group/church and only whilst the licence remains current. Please also familiarize yourself with and respect the other licence conditions, which can be found at www.gotherefor.com/licence.

Please direct all copyright enquiries and permission requests to the publisher.

Matthias Media

(St Matthias Press Ltd ACN 067 558 365)

Email: info@matthiasmedia.com.au

Internet: www.matthiasmedia.com.au

Please visit our website for current postal and telephone contact information.

Matthias Media (USA)

Email: sales@matthiasmedia.com

Internet: www.matthiasmedia.com

Please visit our website for current postal and telephone contact information.

Scripture quotations are from the Holy Bible, English Standard Version® (ESV®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Cover design and typesetting by Lankshear Design.

SONG OF SONGS

» HOW TO MAKE THE MOST OF THESE STUDIES

1. What is an Interactive Bible Study?

Interactive Bible Studies are a bit like a guided tour of a famous city. They take you through a particular part of the Bible, helping you to know where to start, pointing out things along the way, suggesting avenues for further exploration, and making sure that you know how to get home. Like any good tour, the real purpose is to allow you to go exploring for yourself—to dive in, have a good look around, and discover for yourself the riches that God's word has in store.

In other words, these studies aim to provide stimulation and input and point you in the right direction, while leaving you to do plenty of the exploration and discovery yourself.

We hope that these studies will stimulate lots of 'interaction'—interaction with the Bible, with the things we've written, with your own current thoughts and attitudes, with other people as you discuss them, and with God as you talk to him about it all.

2. The format

The studies contain five main components:

- sections of text that introduce, inform, summarize and challenge
- numbered questions that help you examine the passage and think through its meaning
- sidebars that provide extra bits of background or optional extra study ideas, especially regarding other relevant parts of the Bible
- ‘Implications’ sections that help you think about what the passage means for you and your life today
- suggestions for thanksgiving and prayer as you close.

3. How to use these studies on your own

- Before you begin, pray that God would open your eyes to what he is saying in the Bible, and give you the spiritual strength to do something about it.
- Work through the study, reading the text, answering the questions about the Bible passage, and exploring the sidebars as you have time.
- Resist the temptation to skip over the ‘Implications’ and ‘Give thanks and pray’ sections at the end. It is important that we not only hear and understand God’s word, but also respond to it. These closing sections help us do that.
- Take what opportunities you can to talk to others about what you’ve learned.

4. How to use these studies in a small group

- Much of the above applies to group study as well. The studies are suitable for structured Bible study or cell groups, as well as for more informal pairs and triplets. Get together with a friend or friends and work through them at your own pace; use them as the basis for regular Bible study with your spouse. You don’t need the formal structure of a ‘group’ to gain maximum benefit.

- For small groups, it is *very useful* if group members can work through the study themselves *before* the group meets. The group discussion can take place comfortably in an hour (depending on how sidetracked you get!) if all the members have done some work in advance.
- The role of the group leader is to direct the course of the discussion and to try to draw the threads together at the end. This will mean a little extra preparation—underlining the sections of text to emphasize and read out loud, working out which questions are worth concentrating on, and being sure of the main thrust of the study. Leaders will also probably want to work out approximately how long they'd like to spend on each part.
- If your group members usually don't work through the study in advance, it's extra important that the leader prepares which parts to concentrate on, and which parts to glide past more quickly. In particular, the leader will need to select which of the 'Implications' to focus on.
- We haven't included an 'answer guide' to the questions in the studies. This is a deliberate move. We want to give you a guided tour of the Bible, not a lecture. There is more than enough in the text we have written and the questions we have asked to point you in what we think is the right direction. The rest is up to you.

5. Bible translation

We quote from and refer to the English Standard Version, which we recommend. There should not generally be any problems, however, if you are using a different translation. (Nevertheless, it might be useful to have an ESV on hand in case of any confusion.)

» STUDY 1

THE BEST SONG
EVER

SONG OF SONGS IS ONE OF THE strangest books in the Old Testament (and indeed, in the Bible). It's not about anything that books of the Bible are normally about: it's not about the history of Israel, the life of Jesus, the salvation of humanity, the law, or any of the other topics that pop up regularly in the Old and New Testaments. In fact, it's one of only two books in the Bible that doesn't even explicitly mention God! (The book of Esther is the other, if you're curious.) Song of Songs isn't just slightly odd—you can sometimes wonder how it ended up in the Bible at all!

But at the same time, Song of Songs is one of the most attractive books in the Bible. It's a love poem in the form of a dialogue between a man and a woman who are clearly besotted with each other. In this sense, it's a deeply human book about a topic all of us are

interested in: love. Moreover, you don't have to scratch too far beneath the surface to realize this poem is not just about love, but sexual love. Whatever else they may be, this man and woman are clearly more than 'just good friends'! For this reason and many others, Song of Songs has proved a firm favourite with readers for as long as there have been lovers or would-be-lovers—which is forever!

And yet despite its intensely human and intimate focus, and its lack of any direct reference to God, Song of Songs—like the rest of the Bible—is ultimately about Jesus. The apostle Paul tells us that “all the promises of God find their Yes in him [Christ]” (2 Cor 1:20), and Song of Songs is one of those promises. In its intimate depiction of human marriage, Song of Songs gives us a glimmer of that passion and self-

sacrifice of which all human marriage is a foretaste: the passion and self-sacrifice of Christ for the world. In that sense it is truly *the* song of songs; it is truly the best song ever.

A note before we start: you may be feeling a bit awkward or even anxious about studying a book of the Bible that is so openly about romance and sex, especially if you're doing so in a group context. This awkwardness may only be compounded if you happen to be a single person. "What could a book like Song of Songs possibly have to say to me?" you may be wondering. But I

hope that by the end of these studies (well, actually right from the get-go) you'll see that, despite its specific (and even explicit) content, this is a book for everyone. Single or married, it's good for us to talk about romance, sex and marriage in a safe context, and to hear God's good words for us on these matters. It's also a book for all of us—single or married—because Song of Songs is ultimately about the gospel, not just about marriage, and the gospel matters for everyone. So with all this in mind let's listen to the song now, in its entirety.

Song of Solomon?

Different Bibles give different titles to this book. Some (e.g. ESV) call it 'The Song of Solomon'. Others (e.g. NIV) call it 'Song of Songs'. Even though we're using the ESV in these studies, my preference is for 'Song of Songs', for reasons that will hopefully become obvious as you study the book.

Read Song of Songs.

1. Who are the major characters?

2. Who are the minor characters?

3. How do the major characters feel about:

- each other?

- those around them?

4. Write down all the themes, images and phrases that recur throughout the book.

5. What do you think is the high point of the song? Why?

Solomon

1:1 introduces the book as Solomon's Song of Songs. As a result, some have concluded either that Solomon wrote the book, or that he is the 'He' of the poem, or both. However, neither is likely.

It is unlikely that Solomon is the 'He' of the song. First, although Solomon is sometimes mentioned (1:1, 5; 3:6-11; 8:11-12), he never speaks. Second, 8:11-14 explicitly distinguishes between Solomon and the man: where the king tries to buy the woman's love, the woman rejects him in favour of her 'beloved'. Third and most significantly, in a poem all about the uniqueness of this woman in the man's eyes, Solomon would be a strange choice for the lead role—he had 700 wives and 300 mistresses (1 Kgs 11:1-3)! Instead, the poem is more probably 'of Solomon' in that it is a part of the Bible's wisdom tradition, of which Solomon is the exemplar. It is a song worthy of Solomon in its wisdom.

For the reasons listed above, it is also very unlikely that Solomon wrote the song, as he comes off so badly in it! If anything, the song functions as a critique of Solomon's sexual habits: where he had women on tap, the man has eyes for only one woman. In this sense, the song being 'of Solomon' has a satiric ►

SONG OF SONGS IS A LOVE song between two major characters: a woman, who at one point is identified as a 'Shulammite' (6:13), and a man, who at various points is described as a shepherd (e.g. 1:7). They are joined by a host of other, more minor characters: mothers, brothers, watchmen, the 'Others', women of Jerusalem, and, of course, **Solomon**. But the spotlight really belongs to its two leads, the man and the woman, and their intoxicating love for one another. In a whirlwind of images, the couple describe each other in ecstatic terms: his love is "better than wine", his body is made of gold and jewels, and his lips drip with myrrh; she is a "lily among brambles", her body is a garden, and her eyes overwhelm him. At the high point of the song (8:6-7), the woman delivers her verdict on love:

...for love is strong as death,
jealousy is fierce as the grave.
Its flashes are flashes of fire,
the very flame of the LORD.
Many waters cannot quench love,
neither can floods drown it...

In the end, this is a song—the greatest song, the song of all songs—about the passion of these two lovers for each other. But is it about anyone else as well?

Read Song of Songs 4:12-5:1, 6:2 and 8:13.

6. In these verses, what image is used to describe the lovers' relationship?

Read Genesis 2:15-25.

7. Where do the man and woman in this story live?

tinge: Solomon may normally be an exemplar of wisdom but in the case of sex, he could learn a lot from the shepherd and his Shulammitte. The author—probably wisely!—remains anonymous.

8. How do they feel about each other?

The LORD

In our introduction we said there is no explicit reference to God in Song of Songs, and that is still true. The word at the end of 8:6 is literally 'flame of Yah'. It could be that the abbreviated divine name 'Yah' (=Yahweh) is just being used as an intensifier (i.e. it's not just a 'flame' but a 'mighty flame'). But on balance, it is more likely to be an indirect reference to God: 'Yah' is used in association with 'flame' and 'jealousy', both of which are linked to God in Israelite tradition (e.g. Deut 4:24).¹

9. What does this suggest about the relevance of the story in Song of Songs?

Literal or allegorical?

Throughout history, most interpreters have been reluctant to read Song of Songs as what it seems to be on face value: a poem about human love, and in particular sexual love. Rather, they have preferred to read it as an allegory, either about the covenant love of Yahweh for his people Israel (the Jewish reading) or about Christ's love for his church (the Christian reading). Sometimes these readings have pushed believability to its limits. For example, Cyril of Alexandria, a fifth-century theologian, said of 1:13—"My beloved is to me a sachet of myrrh that lies between my breasts"—that one breast was the Old Testament, the other breast was the New Testament, and the sachet was Christ! Although Cyril should get full marks for imagination, his reading—and that of those like him—has far more to do with ancient Greek views of the 'badness' of the body than it does with good Bible reading.

Song of Songs should be read first and foremost as what it first looks like: a rhapsody on the goodness of human love in the world that God has made. Of course it can be about more than that, too—as we will see in study 4. But it is about at least that.

Song of Songs is primarily a love song about two particular people—one man and one woman. But it has something more to say, too: over and over, it sets that love in a *garden*, which makes us think of another couple—Adam and Eve—who also lived in a garden, and who also were “naked and were not ashamed” (Gen 2:25). In that sense, Song of Songs is a specific description of a general, created reality: human, romantic, sexual love. As such, it has something to say about *all* lovers (or would-be lovers), not just the two lovers in this book.

» Implications

(Choose one or more of the following to think about further or to discuss in your group.)

- Is there anything in (or about) Song of Songs that surprised you as you read through it? If so, what was it and why do you think you were surprised?

-
- “Romance is irrelevant as far as Christian relationships are concerned. The only things Christians should worry about is whether the other person is free to be married and whether they’re a Christian.” What do you think about this statement?

 - Proverbs 5:15-19 is extremely similar to parts of Song of Songs in its tone and imagery. Read these verses slowly and carefully. How do they urge us to act when it comes to our romantic and sexual relationships?

» Give thanks and pray

- Thank God for the passion he’s built into human romantic relationships—a passion which clearly reflects his own! (“The very flame of the LORD”; 8:6.)
- Pray for those who are married, that the intensity of their love for their spouse might mirror that of the two lovers for each other.

Endnote

1. See Barry G Webb, *Five Festal Garments: Christian reflections on The Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes and Esther*, NSBT, IVP, Downers Grove, 2000, p. 24. I am indebted to Barry for a number of his insights on Song of Songs.

» STUDY 2

LET'S TALK ABOUT SEX

IN 1991, HIP-HOP GROUP SALT-N-Pepa caused quite a stir with the release of their song, 'Let's talk about sex'. It was a song about sex by an all-female band, and although it was never rude, it was certainly frank:

Let's talk about sex, baby
Let's talk about you and me
Let's talk about all the good things
and the bad things that may be.
Let's talk about sex.

It might surprise you to learn that God beat Salt-N-Pepa to talking about sex by several thousand years. As we've

already seen, Song of Songs is a soaring celebration of the power of romantic love. But it's not just about romance; it's also about sex. As the lovers sing, they can't help but say how gorgeous they find each other's bodies and how they can't wait to have sex with each other. Although never rude, it too is frank: if there are scenes in here to make us swoon, there are also scenes to make us blush. But this shouldn't put us off. In Song of Songs, God is simply saying to us, "Let's talk about sex".

So let's talk.

Read Song of Songs 4:1-5:1 and 5:10-16.

1. How do the man and woman describe each other? Draw a picture of what they would look like if these descriptions were literal.

Woman	Man

-
2. What do these images tell us about how the man and woman actually look? For example, "Your teeth are like a flock of shorn ewes that have come up from the washing" (4:2) = "Your teeth are white".

 3. From these descriptions, how do they feel about each other?

 4. There is something of a progression in 4:12-5:1.
 - What is the 'garden'?

 - What is the 'status' of the garden in:
 - a. 4:12
-

b. 4:16

c. 5:1

- What does all of this describe?

5. Song of Songs uses the image of a garden to describe sex elsewhere as well (see 2:3-15, 6:11, 7:11-13, 8:13-14).

- Where else in the Bible do we read about sex in a garden?

- What does this garden image suggest about whether Song of Songs presents the sex of its lovers in a positive or a negative light?

FROM THE VERY BEGINNING OF THE Bible, God tells us that sex is good. He puts a man and a woman in the garden of Eden and he tells them to become “one flesh” (Gen 2:24). And they happily oblige! “The man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed” (Gen 2:25). In Song of Songs, we see a glorious example of this. The man and the woman are delighted by each other’s bodies, and long to make them ‘one flesh’ in sex. At first, the ‘garden’ of the woman’s body is locked up. But then she invites the man in, he accepts, and

the experience is blissful.

What is the song’s point? It is that *sex is good*. It’s as if the man and woman have been able to sneak back into Eden, pre-Fall, and have sex as it was always meant to be; that in love and sex, the lovers have been able to find a ‘walled garden’ that sin can’t get into. It’s beautiful.

But the writer of Song of Songs also knows it’s not as simple as this. Even something as good as sex has been damaged by the Fall.

6. Read the following verses from Song of Songs. What do they say about the effect of sin on sex? (E.g. How people view our bodies; how people attempt to control how we use our bodies; sexual abuse.)

- 1:5-6a

- 1:6b (“my own vineyard” refers to the woman’s body)

- 5:7

THE WRITER OF SONG OF SONGS IS very positive about sex, but he is not naive. He knows that, this side of the Fall, sin has turned sex into a cause of pain as well as joy. Sex can be an arena for *contempt*—seen in the daughters of Jerusalem (i.e. other women) looking down on the woman because of how she looks; *control*—seen in the woman’s brothers working her so hard on the vineyard she can’t even look after her own ‘vineyard’ (i.e. her body), and whom she might give it to in sex; and *violence*—the woman’s veil in 5:7 is probably a cloak, indicating that the guards stripped her of her clothes and,

by implication, sexually assaulted her. Although note that the assault takes place in a dream sequence and not in real life (see 5:2), so this probably represents the woman’s sexual anxiety rather than an actual assault she suffered.

Thankfully, this is not where the song ends. Love—even something as complex as sexual love—can still survive in a fallen world, “for love is strong as death” (8:6). But as Song of Songs recognizes, sin has infected love and sex: even these lovers have sexual problems, and all of us need rescuing from sin, including sexual sin.

Read 1 Corinthians 6:9-11.

7. Read the list of sins in verses 9-10. How many are listed, and how many of them are sexual?

8. What hope does God hold out to sinners—including sexual sinners—in verse 11?

» Implications

(Choose one or more of the following to think about further or to discuss in your group.)

- A non-Christian friend of yours says to you, "Christians are anti-sex!" What do you say in response?

- A teenager is going through puberty, and as they change sexually, they start to feel uncomfortable and even guilty about their body. With all its sensuous imagery about bodies, what help might Song of Songs be to this person?

-
- If you're honest with yourself, are there times when you've used sex as an opportunity to judge, control, or even hurt someone? What sins in the area of sexuality do you need to bring to Jesus for both forgiveness and fixing? (This may be a question to think and pray about on your own, or to talk about with a trusted Christian friend or leader—especially if you're doing these studies with a group of people you don't know very well.)

 - Pornography is a huge problem in our society, both for Christians and for non-Christians. And yet Song of Songs is clearly also erotic. How do the song and pornography differ in their approach to sex, and how might this help us in our struggle to stay pure in a porn-soaked culture?

» Give thanks and pray

- Thank God for the joy and beauty of sex.
- When you sin sexually, pray that God will remind you that he has justified and sanctified you, and ask him to help you live up to this status.

» STUDY 3

LOVE AND MARRIAGE

Love and marriage, love and marriage
go together like a horse and carriage.

SO WE'RE TOLD BY FRANK SINATRA in his 1955 hit, 'Love and marriage'. But is it true? Do love and marriage go together like a horse and carriage? And what about love's first cousin, sex? Does that go with marriage? Or are they separate, and so can be enjoyed separately?

After all the sexual energy we've been exposed to in Song of Songs so far, we may be tempted to read into it an argument for unrestrained sexual expression—sex without limits. Certainly, the couple's sexual appetite for each other is voracious. But does that mean the song is advocating the goodness of sex anywhere and everywhere, including outside the normal biblical model of marriage? Let's find out.

Read Song of Songs 2:3-7, 3:1-5 and 8:1-4.

1. What phrase recurs at the end of each passage?

2. What is happening in each passage before the refrain?

3. What do you think the refrain means?

THERE IS A REFRAIN IN SONG OF Songs that is repeated three times (with only minor variation):

I adjure you, O daughters of
Jerusalem,
that you not stir up or awaken love
until it pleases.

In the lead-up to each refrain, the lovers have been getting close: they are lying next to each other, cuddling (2:3-6); she is dreaming of bringing the man into

her mother's bedroom (3:1-4); they are lying down together again, this time also at her mother's house, and after they've been drinking (8:1-3)! But just as things start getting racy, the woman calls a timeout: "Do not stir up or awaken love until it pleases". There is a time for what they want to do, but this is not it. Clearly, as good as sex is, it is not something to be enjoyed without limits. But that raises a question: what are its limits? When will love be 'pleased' to awaken?

Read Song of Songs 3:1-5:1.

4. What kind of scene is this (3:1; see also 5:2)? Is it actually happening?

5. What does the woman see in 3:6-11?

6. Is the woman part of the scene? If so, how? (See 6:12; compare 3:6 and 8:5. And remember: this is poetry, so the answer may not be as obvious as you'd like!)

7. What happens directly after this scene, in 4:1-5:1? (See also study 2.)

8. How does this help us understand what the lovers were waiting for when it

came to love being 'pleased to awaken'?

SONG OF SONGS 3:1-5:1 IS A DREAM sequence: the woman is on her bed at night, but is looking for her love (3:1); she sleeps but her heart is awake (5:2). In her dream, she imagines Solomon's wedding day (3:11). But it is not really Solomon's wedding day but her *lover's*, who in her dream has become like a king to her. In her dream, it is Solomon who is "coming up from the wilderness" (3:6), but once she wakes, in real life, it is the *man* doing so, with his lover leaning on him (8:5). Moreover, it is not just the *man's* wedding day, but also *hers*. She looks around at the spectacle of Solomon's cavalcade and realizes she is in the thick of it: "Before I was aware, my desire set me among the chariots of my kinsman, a prince" (6:12). 'Solomon'

arrives in a chariot and the woman is set next to him as his 'queen'. In other words, it is the woman dreaming about her wedding day.

What's the point of all this? It enables us to join the dots. 3:11 is the only reference to marriage in the whole song, and now it's clear that it's the marriage of the man and the woman. Significantly—even when she's dreaming!—it's only *after* they're married that the couple have sex (4:1-5:1), not *before*. In fact, in many ways this is the storyline of the whole song. There's the longing for sex within marriage (1:1-2:17), a dream about sex within marriage (3:1-5:1), and then actual sex within marriage (5:2-8:14). The point is clear: as good as sex is, it is only once they are married that love (i.e. sex) should be 'pleased to awaken'.

Read 1 Corinthians 7:1-9.

9. What reason does God give here for getting married?

10. Once people are married, what are they to do?

11. What does God say to the unmarried?

12. What does this say about the right relationship between sex and marriage?

THE BIBLE IS CLEAR, IN BOTH THE Old Testament and the New Testament, that sex is only for marriage. Sex is so powerful that the only safe place to contain it is within the covenant framework of marriage, where it is protected not just by desire but also by strong promises of fidelity. But once it is guarded by marriage, it is a powerful means of sustaining that marriage; so much so that God tells married couples they have a duty to have sex with each other lest

their relationship suffer (1 Cor 7:3-5). Song of Songs illustrates what a delightful duty that is. And yet hanging over all of that, there is also an intriguing hint that sex and marriage are not the be-all and end-all of life; that a person could miss out on everything being described in Song of Songs and still be a whole human being (1 Cor 7:8; see also 7:38). How this could be, and how Song of Songs fits with that understanding, is the topic of our final study.

» Implications

(Choose one or more of the following to think about further or to discuss in your group.)

- For those who are not married: Are there areas in your life where you are over-stepping the mark in terms of your sexual purity? How can you remind and help yourself not to “stir up or awaken love until it pleases”?

- Again, for those who are not married: Song of Songs might be hard to read because it reminds you of what you’re missing out on. Does taking that legitimate grief and disappointment to God mean that you aren’t trusting him as your loving Father who knows everything you need? Why, or why not?

-
- For those who are married: Is there anything you find confronting in 1 Corinthians 7:1-9? What things might you need to change in your own marriage as a result of reading those verses?

 - For everyone: Read 1 Corinthians 7:25-35. From these verses and verses 1-9, which we looked at earlier in this study, what are the advantages and disadvantages of being single and being married?

» Give thanks and pray

- Thank God for the gift of marriage and the safe place it provides for sex.
- Pray that God would help you to be sexually pure, whether you're married or single.

» STUDY 4

THE GOOD NEWS ABOUT LOVE

SO FAR IN SONG OF SONGS WE'VE looked at what it has to say about romance, sex and marriage. But how does this book fit into the wider message of the Bible? If, as we have said “all the promises of God find their Yes in him [Christ]” (2 Cor 1:20), and Song of Songs is one of those promises, then

how does that work? What does Song of Songs tell us about Jesus? And what if I'm not married and maybe never will be: what does this book have to say to me? How is this good news about human love also good news about God's love? That's what we'll be looking at in this study.

Read Ephesians 5:22-33.

1. How should wives and husbands relate to each other?

-
2. How do Christ and the church relate to each other?

 3. How does Christ's relationship with the church inform Paul's views about how wives and husbands should relate to each other?

 4. How does Paul justify applying principles to do with Christ and the church to human marriages (vv. 31-32)?

PAUL TELLS WIVES TO SUBMIT TO their husbands and husbands to love their wives. He bases this directive on the fact that the church submits to Christ and Christ loves the church. But how can Paul do this? What do these two seemingly totally separate relationships have to do with each other? Paul tells us in 5:31-32. Quoting Genesis 2:24, he refers to the first human marriage, of Adam and Eve. But then he says that this verse is talking about Christ's relationship with the church. That is, before God designed human marriage he had in mind an even deeper 'marriage': that of Christ and his people. Putting it another

way, it's not that God first dreamt up marriage and then only later thought to himself, "Wow, that looks a bit like the gospel!" No—God conceived first of the gospel and then thought, "How can I help people understand how my Son will love his church and how his church should respond to him? I know! I will place little models of that relationship all over the world—called 'marriages'—so that people will already have a way to understand what Christ will do when he arrives." In short, marriage is a picture of the gospel. And that profoundly affects how we read Song of Songs—a book all about marriage.

5. Read these words from (and about) the man. How is he a model of a husband's love for his wife?

- 4:8-11

- 6:4-10

- 8:6-7

-
6. Read these words from the woman. How is she a model of a wife's respect for her husband?
- 2:3-4

 - 3:6-11

 - 7:10
7. Read Song of Songs 8:6-7. How are the man and the woman a model of a couple's intensity in love for each other?

THE MAN IN THE SONG LOVES HIS wife: he protects her from the dens of leopards and lions (4:8), loves her above all others (6:8-9), and has sealed his heart with hers (8:6). The woman respects her husband: she sits in his shade and delights in him (2:3); in her eyes, he's a king (3:6-11); and she is totally devoted to him: "I am my beloved's" (7:10). Of course, it is not as if love and respect are mutually exclusive. Three times the woman says that 'I am my beloved's', but each time she also says that 'he is

mine' (2:16, 6:3, 7:10). There is a deep mutuality between them. But it's how this mutuality is expressed that makes their marriage so lovely. In that sense, we see Christ and his people all through the song. In Song of Songs, we see the love of a husband and a wife for each other. And in that, because marriage is a model of the gospel, we see something of Jesus' love for the church and how the church should love him in return. As such, we can learn a lot about the gospel from Song of Songs.

Read Revelation 19:6-9.

8. How are God's people, "the saints", described here? (See also Rev 21:2, 9-10.)

9. What does this tell us about the nature of our earthly marriages?

ONE FINAL COMMENT IS WORTH making. If you're a single person, you may have been wondering what Song of Songs has to say to you. Song of Songs is all about people who are married, and you're not. But the Bible has some surprising words for our sex-saturated world and marriage-heavy churches: marriage isn't forever. Or rather, it is, but the only eternal expression of it will be the marriage of Christ to his church. Just as marriage points to the gospel, so the gospel points to a future in which human marriage will have run its course,

because it will have found its fulfilment in Christ's marriage to his people. That is why Jesus can say there will be no marriage in the resurrection (Matt 22:30). There will be no point: marriage is a sign to point people to the future and, once that future arrives, the sign will no longer be needed. This is also why God can say that single people are every bit as human and whole as married people. The ultimate goal in life is not marriage to another person, but marriage to Christ. And everyone—married or single—can come to *that* wedding.

» Implications

(Choose one or more of the following to think about further or to discuss in your group.)

- Song of Songs is full of passionate exchanges between its two lovers. What role do you think passion should play in our relationship with God?

- For those who are married: Which areas of your marriage model the gospel well? Which areas could do with some work?

-
- For those who are single: What comfort does the gospel offer when you're tempted or are made to feel 'second class' or 'incomplete' because you are single?

» Give thanks and pray

- Thank God that, whether we're married or single, we can point people to the new creation by the way we live.
- Pray that God would give us a passion for him that matches the passion of the lovers in Song of Songs for each other.

Feedback on this resource

We really appreciate getting feedback about our resources—not just suggestions for how to improve them, but also positive feedback and ways they can be used. We especially love to hear that the resources may have helped someone in their Christian growth.

You can send feedback to us via the 'Feedback' menu in our online store, or write to us at info@matthiasmedia.com.au.



Matthias Media is an evangelical publishing ministry that seeks to persuade all Christians of the truth of God's purposes in Jesus Christ as revealed in the Bible, and equip them with high-quality resources, so that by the work of the Holy Spirit they will:

- abandon their lives to the honour and service of Christ in daily holiness and decision-making
- pray constantly in Christ's name for the fruitfulness and growth of his gospel
- speak the Bible's life-changing word whenever and however they can—in the home, in the world and in the fellowship of his people.

Our resources range from Bible studies and books through to training courses, audio sermons and children's Sunday School material. To find out more, and to access samples and free downloads, visit our website:

www.matthiasmedia.com

How to buy our resources

1. Direct from us over the internet:
 - in the US: www.matthiasmedia.com
 - in Australia: www.matthiasmedia.com.au
2. Direct from us by phone: please visit our website for current phone contact information.
3. Through a range of outlets in various parts of the world. Visit **www.matthiasmedia.com/contact** for details about recommended retailers in your part of the world.
4. Trade enquiries can be addressed to:
 - in the US and Canada: sales@matthiasmedia.com
 - in Australia and the rest of the world: sales@matthiasmedia.com.au

Register at our website for our **free** regular email update to receive information about the latest new resources, **exclusive special offers**, and free articles to help you grow in your Christian life and ministry.

Other Interactive and Topical Bible Studies from Matthias Media

Our Interactive Bible Studies (IBS) and Topical Bible Studies (TBS) are a valuable resource to help you keep feeding from God's word. The IBS series works through passages and books of the Bible; the TBS series pulls together the Bible's teaching on topics such as money or prayer. As of October 2017, the series contains the following titles:

Beyond Eden

GENESIS 1-11

Authors: Phillip Jensen and Tony Payne, 9 studies

Out of Darkness

EXODUS 1-18

Author: Andrew Reid, 8 studies

The Shadow of Glory

EXODUS 19-40

Author: Andrew Reid, 7 studies

The One and Only

DEUTERONOMY

Author: Bryson Smith, 8 studies

Remember the Rock

JOSHUA

Author: Phil Campbell, 6 studies

The Good, the Bad

and the Ugly

JUDGES

Author: Mark Baddeley, 10 studies

Famine and Fortune

RUTH

Authors: Barry Webb and David Höhne, 4 studies

God Will Have His King

1 SAMUEL

Author: Des Smith, 9 studies

Renovator's Dream

NEHEMIAH

Authors: Phil Campbell and Greg Clarke, 7 studies

The Eye of the Storm

JOB

Author: Bryson Smith, 6 studies

The Beginning of Wisdom

PROVERBS VOLUME 1

Author: Joshua Ng, 7 studies

Living the Good Life

PROVERBS VOLUME 2

Author: Joshua Ng, 8 studies

The Search for Meaning

ECCLESIASTES

Author: Tim McMahon, 9 studies

Garden of Love

SONG OF SONGS

Author: Des Smith, 4 studies

Two Cities

ISAIAH

Authors: Andrew Reid and Karen Morris, 9 studies

Kingdom of Dreams

DANIEL

Authors: Andrew Reid and Karen Morris, 9 studies

Burning Desire

OBADIAH AND MALACHI

Authors: Phillip Jensen and Richard Pulley, 6 studies

Warning Signs

JONAH

Author: Andrew Reid, 6 studies

Living by Faith

HABAKKUK

Author: Ian Carmichael, 5 studies

On That Day

ZECARIAH

Author: Tim McMahon, 8 studies

Full of Promise

THE BIG PICTURE OF THE O.T.

Authors: Phil Campbell and Bryson Smith, 8 studies

The Good Living Guide

MATTHEW 5:1-12

Authors: Phillip Jensen and Tony Payne, 9 studies

News of the Hour

MARK

Authors: Peter Bolt and Tony Payne, 10 studies

Proclaiming the Risen Lord

LUKE 24-ACTS 2

Author: Peter Bolt, 6 studies

Mission Unstoppable

ACTS

Author: Bryson Smith, 10 studies

The Free Gift of Life

ROMANS 1-5

Author: Gordon Cheng, 8 studies

The Free Gift of Sonship

ROMANS 6-11

Author: Gordon Cheng, 8 studies

The Freedom of Christian

Living

ROMANS 12-16

Author: Gordon Cheng, 7 studies

Free for All

GALATIANS

Authors: Phillip Jensen and Kel Richards, 8 studies

Walk this Way

EPHESIANS

Author: Bryson Smith, 8 studies

Partners for Life

PHILIPPIANS

Author: Tim Thorburn, 8 studies

The Complete Christian

COLOSSIANS

Authors: Phillip Jensen and Tony Payne, 8 studies

To the Householder

1 TIMOTHY

Authors: Phillip Jensen and Greg Clarke, 9 studies

Run the Race

2 TIMOTHY

Author: Bryson Smith, 6 studies

The Path to Godliness

TITUS

Authors: Phillip Jensen and Tony Payne, 7 studies

From Shadow to Reality

HEBREWS

Author: Joshua Ng, 10 studies

The Implanted Word

JAMES

Authors: Phillip Jensen and Kirsten Birkett, 8 studies

Homeward Bound

1 PETER

Authors: Phillip Jensen and Tony Payne, 10 studies

All You Need to Know

2 PETER

Author: Bryson Smith, 6 studies

Rest Assured

1 JOHN

Author: Bryson Smith, 9 studies

The Vision Statement

REVELATION

Author: Greg Clarke, 9 studies

Bold I Approach

PRAYER

Author: Tony Payne, 6 studies

Cash Values

MONEY

Author: Tony Payne, 5 studies

Sing for Joy

SINGING IN CHURCH

Author: Nathan Lovell, 6 studies

The Blueprint

DOCTRINE

Authors: Phillip Jensen and Tony Payne, 9 studies

Woman of God

THE BIBLE ON WOMEN

Author: Terry Blowes, 8 studies