

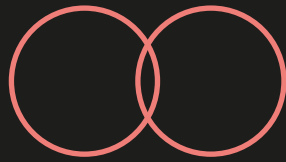
# MAGNA

## OPERA



*A Bible Study Guide on the Song of Solomon*

VÍCTOR ARMENTEROS



SOLOMON AND SHULAMIT



**THREE ARE EVEN BETTER,  
FOR A TRIPLE-BRAIDED CORD  
IS NOT EASILY BROKEN.**

**ECCLESIASTES 4:12 (NLT)**

WHAT IS  
THIS  
DOING IN THE  
*Bible?*

AN INTRODUCTION

Even in a world as globalized as ours, taboos continue to influence the way we think. Some of these taboos may take the form of a stereotype—be it real or not—and become an obstacle to our understanding of others. Other taboos mutilate our thoughts through prejudice, be it spoken or not. And that is what happens with the *Song of Solomon*, even in our days. We open the Bible expecting to find stories that guide us and serve as role models; or hymns that elevate our spirit and move us; or, in many cases, norms that set the path straight before us. What we don't expect is to find a book that talks to us about everyday love, along with its doubts and passions, its compliments and clashes, its sexual intimacy and "racy"<sup>1</sup> language. Yet, there it is, in the Bible. And it's there for a reason. Nothing has been kept in the Bible for centuries without it improving our understanding of the world and of God. Nothing.

Being the wise man that he is, Solomon loves to question our stereotyping so that we allow ourselves new points of view. That is what he achieves when he compiles a multitude of maxims in *Proverbs* (some of his own making, but many from others), allowing us to see other versions of the Truth living in the sayings of the people. The same happens with *Qohelet* (Ecclesiastes), where he questions everything so that we can better understand the All (almighty, omniscient, omnipresent and *omniloving* God) and the respect we owe Him. And especially in the *Song of Solomon*, where he draws our attention to the sincere and natural love of a couple (and even—if we make a careful allegory—the love of God for His people). A love so natural and sincere it

dissipates our artificial and dissonant taboos. There is no doubt Solomon knew a lot about artificial and dissonant "loves," but, in the contrast between life and reflection, he left us with an incredibly beautiful book about real love. Without Plato, without Disney, and without Netflix. A livable love. That is why it is in the Bible.

How did he do this? Well, he didn't choose the tweets of the time (*Proverbs*) nor the philosophical papers (*Qohelet*). Instead, he chose **the** winner of the Grammys, and produced a musical masterpiece. For some—the most religious—, it is oratory; for others—the most educated—, it is opera; for some—those who love films and the theatre—, it is simply a musical. For us, the genre is beside the point. What matters is that it is the expression of love between two people, in the form of song and poetry. Who has never written a love poem? You haven't yet? Excuse me, but you have missed out on an experience that is as passionate as it is embarrassing (I write this for the pragmatists among you, who nevertheless have, at some point, been washed over by love and would rather forget about it).

### Let's Slice the Pizza

When we have friends over for pizza, we always face the same dilemma: How should we slice the pizza? Because some would eat half a pizza and others (usually women) are already full with a tiny piece. It's so difficult to slice a pizza in a way that

makes everybody happy! All joking aside, when we try to “slice” the books of the Bible, something similar happens. Everybody brings in their bias and interpretation to the table. My “slice” of the book of *Song of Solomon* may not satisfy everyone. Well, we will do better next time. This is my proposal for now:

1. The Loveliest Song (Song of Solomon 1:1):  
**Better Than Anyone Else.**
2. My Sun-Kissed Delight (Song of Solomon 1:2-11):  
**The Greatest Beauty.**
3. Compliments (Song of Solomon 1:12-2:7):  
**The Best Love.**
4. Spring Encounters (Song of Solomon 2:8-13/2:14-3:5):  
**The Purest Kind.**
5. Royal Wedding (Song of Solomon 3:6-11):  
**The Most Profitable Contract.**
6. Beautiful (Song of Solomon 4:1-7:9):  
**The Best Project.**
7. Words of Love (Song of Solomon 7:10-8:14):  
**The Best Words.**

Why this slice? For a simple reason: we divide the *Song of Solomon* into smaller parts so we don’t overdose on knowledge. That way, piece by piece, this biblical “pizza” makes its way into our system better.

## A Special Book for Special People

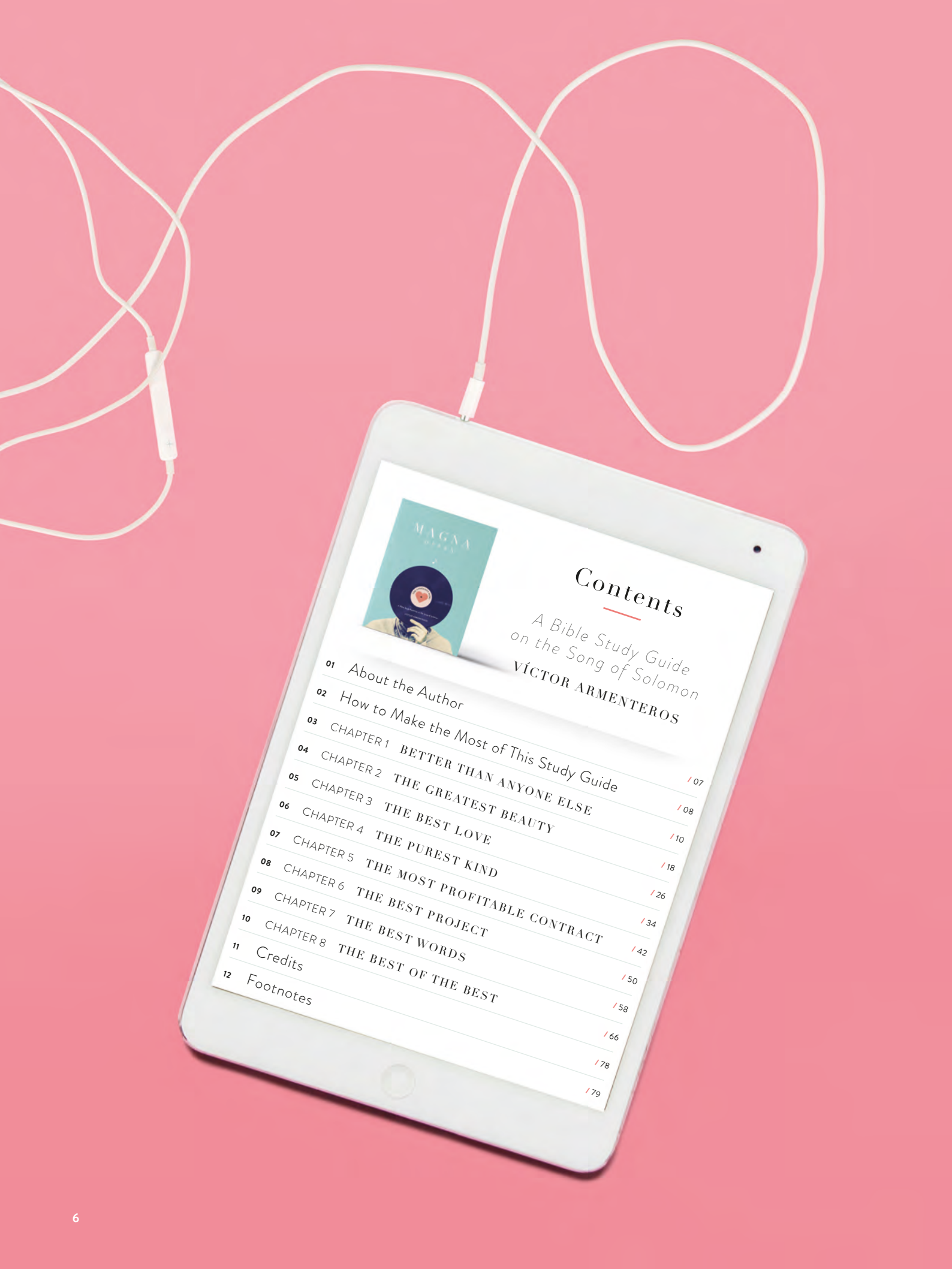
Lots of people voice their opinion about *Song of Solomon*. However, most would not dare to say—like some 1<sup>st</sup> Century Jews—that it should not be part of the canon, but they do think it is a second-rate book. They are wrong because there are few things that are more similar to the love of God than the healthy and true love of a couple. Of course, we are people and as such we make mistakes. However, it is also clear that the energy of

that love overcomes many, many obstacles. Do not let yourself be fooled by the narrative of short-term love with zero ideals. You deserve something better: the re-editing of the *Loveliest Song* in your own life.

I think that the time has come for us to dive into the *Song of Solomon* (the best translation of the title of this book would be the *Loveliest Song*) with the goal of addressing our own taboos, whether they are based on stereotypes or prejudice. Why? Because we have been designed to love and it would be good to see what the Bible has to say about this phenomenon. After all, it is a topic we talk about, sing about, cry about and enjoy so much that it deserves at least a fraction of our time. Wouldn’t you agree?

Very well, then. Welcome to the performance of the *Loveliest Song!* Entertainment and endorphins ensured. Free entry and gratifying<sup>2</sup> end for all.





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*A Bible Study Guide  
on the Song of Solomon*  
VÍCTOR ARMENTEROS

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



**Víctor M. Armenteros** has a PhD in Semitic Philology (University of Granada) and a PhD in Old Testament Theology (River Plate Adventist University, Argentina), as well as a Master's in Education (University of Deusto, Spain). He has been teaching for more than two decades, in the Sagunto Adventist College (Spain) and in River Plate Adventist University (Argentina), where he served as academic vice-rector. He is currently the dean of the Sagunto Adventist College (Spain), where he also teaches. In addition, he serves as the Education director of the Spanish Union of Churches Conference.

He shares his life with Esther Sánchez—who also holds a PhD in Theology—the joy of his heart. They both enjoy traveling, creative cooking and reading everything that comes their way.

## HOW TO MAKE THE MOST OF THIS STUDY GUIDE



### TIP 1 / PRAYER

“Prayer is the opening of your heart to God as to a friend.”<sup>1</sup> The most important thing you can do as you begin this journey on love and relationships is to invite God to be a part of it. Start every single chapter with a heartfelt prayer. Be honest with God about your expectations and your desires. Share your struggles and pain with Him. Call upon the Holy Spirit to open your eyes to what you need to learn on this important topic. Ask God to make an impact in your heart, so that this study results in growth for you. Make your prayer time with God special. Use silent prayer, keep a prayer journal, start a prayer group, use lettering to write down your prayers... the possibilities are endless. Choose a way that helps **you** best communicate with God.



### TIP 2 / JOURNAL

Take an active and intentional approach to learning about Song of Solomon. Use a journal or a notebook to write down what God (and the Holy Spirit) inspires as you read or listen to the text. Don't just take it in, but rather react and respond to the ideas that are presented. Turn them into your own words. Write down your conclusions and key takeaways, and also your questions. If you are the creative type, go ahead and practice lettering, draw, compose...



### TIP 3 / PRAYER OF THE DAY

In each chapter, the aim of the prayer of the day is to focus your prayer time on the topic of the day. This short prayer after the main text should get you started and prompt you to invite the Holy Spirit to act in your life in a specific way. You can use it for silent prayer, group prayer, written prayer, lettering... We need God by our side, and the way we communicate with Him is through prayer. Start with prayer and end with prayer.



### TIP 4 / QUESTIONS

The questions at the end of each lesson can be used for personal reflection or group discussion. Hopefully, they even encourage you to ask more questions of your own. If in a group, always be respectful and loving towards others. Listen actively and respectfully share your own views.





## TIP 5 / GO DEEPER

This section invites you to go deeper in the study. A journal, notebook or your phone notes app will come in handy. It will also be great to consult Bible commentaries and dictionaries. Ask for recommendations from your pastor, youth director or mentor. The goal is for you to become an active learner in this study, so that you can get the most out of it. You can do this section on your own or with friends. Here, you will find additional Bible texts to read as well as questions, suggestions for research, prayer prompts, and quotations for reflection.



## TIP 6 / PERSONAL CHALLENGE

The Bible is all about application. It makes no sense to read it and not be affected or transformed by it. An action must inevitably follow. The personal challenge has the goal of helping you implement and put into practice a key idea from the text.



## TIP 7 / ACTIVITIES

Every lesson includes 2 or 3 activities that can be used in a group setting as icebreakers or as an interactive way of addressing key ideas in the text. They are great to use in youth groups, small groups, youth activities, field trips, etc. They can help you to introduce each lesson or be a group challenge at the end.

### HELP US IMPROVE!

We are always looking to provide better resources for you. Let us know what you thought of this one by using this link:

<https://bit.ly/MagnaOperaFeedback>



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# Better Than Anyone Else



KEY TEXT:

Song of Solomon  
1:1

*Handwritten notes in the bottom left corner, including the words 'I love you' and 'I will love you'.*



*Handwritten notes in the bottom right corner, including the words 'I love you' and 'I will love you'.*

*The Loveliest Song,  
which is Solomon's*

SONG OF SOLOMON 1:1

**W**riting poems or composing love songs goes back a long way. They say the first love poem in history (although I do not completely agree; I uphold Genesis 2) could have been written by a priestess of the goddess Inanna, to her beloved king Shu-Sin. This takes us back to the Sumerian era, about 4,000 years ago. The poem goes like this:

*Bridegroom, dear to my heart,  
Goodly is your beauty, honeysweet,  
Lion, dear to my heart,  
Goodly is your beauty, honeysweet.*

Well well well! It looks like someone got ahead of Mariah Carey a long time ago. And the first love song (in fact, the first song of which we have musical notation) is a Hurrian song (no, they were not called that way because they constantly said “hur-ray!”) to the goddess Nikkal in 3400 BC. Since then, more than 100 million love songs have been written. Why so many songs?

That’s easy. Because love matters to us. We care that it works and we care when it doesn’t work. It’s one of the greatest expectations for any human being: to find their better half.<sup>2</sup> And, in addition to that, love is worthy of being transformed into the beauty of word and song. Even the saddest songs about heartbreaks touch us deeply. There’s nothing we can do about it! We have been made to love and be loved.

How should we choose the best of all these love songs? Which one would be number one at the HMAs (*Humanity Music Awards*)? Taylor Swift? Ariana Grande? Stevie Wonder? Elvis Presley? John of the Cross? Gaius Valerius Catullus? Chester Beatty?<sup>3</sup> Actually, none of the above. “The HMA goes to... Solomon.” Solomon? From the Bible? That’s right, Solomon, from the Bible. The *Song of Solomon* has been the quintessential<sup>4</sup> musical piece about love. It has inspired many novels, stage plays and films, especially in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when romance was all the rage. Nowadays, what can I say, its content is brought into question because concepts such as exclusivity, fidelity, equivalence, free will, enduring love and marriage are hotly debated. The “neo-love” exhibits more tolerance than respect, more equity than complementarity, more sexuality than intimacy. These variations hinder us from perceiving the deeper threads in the *Song of Solomon*. We need to identify the right “codes” in order to enjoy this beautiful book, or shall I say, the *Loveliest Song*.



## West Side Story

In 1957, *West Side Story* was performed for the first time in the Winter Garden Theater in Broadway. It was an adaptation of William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* (published in 1597, look at that!). Just like in the British tragedy, two young teenagers from different socio-economic backgrounds fall in love. Tony (Romeo) fights for the love of Maria (Juliet), in spite of the Jets (Montagues) and Sharks (Capulets). The play became so famous it continues to be performed in many countries even to this day (a new film by Steven Spielberg is coming soon).

Through its success, we can see how true love is not limited by race, culture or status. People are really into this kind of love, which overcomes all obstacles—so much so that many of today's soap operas base their success on the efforts that someone who is socially irrelevant makes to win the love of the “royals” or other better-off people. People want the kind of love that “gets” you someone who is better than anyone else.

So, that is what *Song of Solomon* or, as we could call it, *East Side Story*, is all about. An eastern story about the love between a good-looking monarch (remember that his father David was a blonde hunk) and a humble peasant girl. A story of lovers, true friends, friends who are not so friends (after all, these girls were trying to steal the Shulamite's boyfriend) and a lot of people putting in their two cents<sup>5</sup>—wait a minute, could this be any more current? This was a narrative that was so fascinating in Old Testament times it used to be read during Passover when the fields were blooming and youthful passions were unleashed. The book was so respected it surpassed the real story and became a comparison between the love of God and His people.

## The First Love

We already know Solomon had a weakness for the female sex, but that was not always the case. Before engaging in an irregular dynamic, he experienced a spectacular first love. And that first love followed the model of the first couple of this world, Adam and Eve. Have a look at some of the details:

- › **Two names, one root.** The protagonist of the *Song of Solomon* is called Šelomoh (Solomon) and his lover, Šelomit (Shulamit). Both terms come from the word šalom, which, in addition to peace, has to do with wholeness. What does that remind you of? Yes, of course, of the first man (Iš) and the first woman (Išah). Two names, male and female, sharing the same root. A coincidence? I don't think so.

Have you ever noticed how couples tend to change the name of their loved one—especially in an intimate setting? They mostly use affectionate nicknames. Some are very yummy (Honey, Pumpkin, Muffin), others have to do with nature (Sunshine) and animals (Teddy Bear, Tiger, Kitty), and, my favorite kind, some come from pop culture (Barbie, Superman, Rambo). We give a special name to what matters to us in a special way. I'm quite sure Solomon would address the Shulamite as “my sun-kissed delight” (we'll talk about that later on) because he felt, in the tenderest of ways, that she was someone who made him whole. At the root of his emotions was true love.

“Have you ever noticed how couples tend to change the name of their loved one, especially in an intimate setting?”

› **From the garden of Eden to the gardens in Jerusalem.**

The book constantly draws from country and agricultural imagery. Beauty has to do with animals, flowers and fruits. This sounds weird to us because we are urbanites and all we understand are *gadgets* and *selfies*. Our relationship with vegetables and fruits is limited to our visits to the supermarket, and, at most, our attempts at an urban garden with some tomatoes and lettuce. The language of *Song of Solomon* brings us back to the beauty of the garden of Eden. Perhaps that is why at the time of Jesus, many Jews declared this was the greatest book of the Tanakh (the Hebrew Bible).

We keep on doing the same thing in spite of our sporadic connection with nature. Let me share some phrases I found on Pinterest as an example:

- “Colors are the smiles of nature” (Leigh Hunt).
- “Deep in their roots, all flowers keep the light” (Theodore Roethke).
- “When you carry the sun on the inside, it doesn’t matter if it’s raining on the outside” (Anonymous).

Or how about this poem by Clairel Estévez:

### Into the Wild

*Take me somewhere beautiful.  
 To a place, Where nature still breathing—  
 full of life.  
 Let us dance to the sound of the crickets.  
 While total darkness  
 Unfolds the stars.<sup>6</sup>*

Could it be that we unwittingly still miss the garden of Eden? I think so. On the inside, in the deepest part of our being, we feel nostalgia for the world we were created for, as well as the love relationships that started there.

- › **It shares the values of Genesis 2.** Certain principles that we read in the story of Adam and Eve show up in *Song of Solomon*. For example, the complementarity of the first human beings results in equivalence (they are not only peers, but also equal in opportunity). In the *Song of Solomon*, where you come from or what condition you're in doesn't matter; what matters is being able to love each other at the same level.
- › **In the first three chapters of Genesis** we find many concepts that are later developed in different parts of the Bible. Many of these concepts, which are recorded before the entry of sin, are timeless principles. In other words, they are part of our design, whatever condition we're in. The love of a couple is one of those principles. *Song of Solomon* testifies to that, as does our longing to share our life with someone else.

“Could it be that we unwittingly still miss the garden of Eden?”

Would you like to learn more about these principles? Don't worry, we will come back to them later on.

There is no doubt that, whatever we call ourselves, having a common root-ideology or a shared project is relevant in love. And what can we say about the timeless principles the Word of God teaches us. They are not meant to bother us, but to guide us. And, let it be said, they definitely work.

*Prayer of the day*

Dear God, I realize we have been created to love and be loved. Help me to love in a wholehearted and pure way, in the same way that you love me.

# QUESTIONS



1. **What stood out for you from today's reading? Why?**

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2. **What are your expectations in love? How does your culture affect the way you see and understand love? In what ways is your personal vision of love different from what is established by your culture?**

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3. **"We feel nostalgia for the world we were created for, as well as the love relationships that started there." Do you agree? Why or why not?**

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4. **What do you expect to gain from this study on Song of Solomon (see Song 1:1)?**

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## GO DEEPER

- › **Read** Genesis 1:24-31 and Genesis 2. What lessons do you learn about love from these passages? Make a list of the values you find in Genesis 2. How will you apply them in your relationships?
- › **Read** *Patriarchs and Prophets*, ch. 2, "The Creation."
- › **Research** the structure of Song of Solomon. Use Bible commentaries and dictionaries, contact your pastor or ask your mentor.
- › **Reflect:** "God celebrated the first marriage. Thus the institution has for its originator the Creator of the universe." (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 46)
- › **Look** at this video by Bible Project: <http://bit.ly/BibleProjectSongofSongs>  
*DISCLAIMER: The authors of this video put into question the fact that Solomon was the writer of Song of Solomon. Nevertheless, the video provides a general introduction to and vision of the book and its structure that may be helpful.*
- › **Pray:** Invite God to be a part of this study about love in Song of Solomon. Be honest with Him about what your expectations are, as well as your deepest desires.



## PERSONAL CHALLENGE

Solomon was an *influencer*. The *Loveliest Song* tells us what true love is really about.

Think about your favorite *influencer* (YouTuber, Instagrammer, Tiktoker, actor, tweeter, writer, singer...). What topics do they usually address? What values do they share? How much time do you spend following them?

During this week, we invite you to **choose** Solomon (and the Shulamite), in the Song of Solomon, to be your main *influencer*. Take notes, highlight, ask, reflect, analyze and allow yourself to be influenced by this study. **Every day**, write down a phrase that you liked from each lesson, and share it on your social media. Pray to God that this message also reaches other people who need it.



# ACTIVITIES



## ACTIVITY 1: CREATE YOUR OWN FLAG

**Materials:** 1 sheet of paper and 1 pen or pencil per person

### Activity Description

- › Each participant will take a few minutes to create their own flag, something that truly represents them. You can add icons, drawings, silhouettes... the limit is your own imagination.
- › After the set time, everyone will show their flag and explain why it represents them. Encourage everyone to make positive comments about everyone else's flag.
- › To make this activity easier, you can also divide the people into smaller groups, depending on the number of participants.

### Application

God is the most creative Being in the universe. Every element of nature and every human being is designed to show a bit of how wonderful God is. Even though we are all different, we have all been created in the image of God. Through our actions, we can all reflect God's love. However, we will each do it in a unique way, thanks to the different gifts God has given each one of us.

Pray to God and thank Him for having made us so unique and for the special gifts He has put in each of us.

## ACTIVITY 2: LET'S BUILD AN "US"

**Materials:**

- › 1-page printed or written copy of the description of a couple: Gabriel and Gabriela. Explain who they are, where they live, what they do for a living, how they met. You will then tear this sheet of paper into many small pieces.
- › A sheet of paper and tape

### Activity Description

- › Give each participant a piece of the page that includes the description of Gabriel and Gabriela. They should try to reconstruct the story on their own. Then, by talking with the rest of the participants, as well as by putting all the pieces back together, they should finally reconstruct the story together.

### Application

Getting to know someone requires time and personal effort. A healthy relationship implies selflessly serving the other person. When we put together parts of "you" and "me," we create an "us" that echoes the biblical theme. When we also include God in the picture, we relive the experience of Adam and Eve (*Iš* and *Išah*) or of Solomon and his beloved (*Šelomoh* and *Šelomit*). This is what all relationships should aim for.

Invest time in getting to know other people; don't just stay on the surface or on the "parts" that we like. That is the only way you will be able to build stronger relationships, based on biblical principles.

Pray together and ask God to help you see beyond the surface of people. Ask Him to give you the ability to see other people the way He sees us.



THE  
GREATEST  
BEAUTY

KEY TEXT:  
SONG  
OF  
SOLOMON  
1:2-11



I AM VERY DARK, BUT LOVELY.  
DO NOT GAZE AT ME BECAUSE I AM DARK,  
BECAUSE THE SUN HAS LOOKED UPON ME,  
BECAUSE I WAS MADE THE KEEPER  
OF VINEYARDS THAT I DON'T OWN.  
TELL ME, WHERE WILL I FIND YOU, MY LOVE?'

**SONG OF SOLOMON 1:5-7**

**C**harles F. Gounod was a religious man and a music composer. This led him to create *Faust*, based on a tale by Goethe. One of the main characters is Marguerite, a young, innocent country-girl who falls into the temptation of external beauty. The best-known aria from this opera is the Jewel Song, in which Marguerite looks at herself in a mirror and feels absolutely gorgeous.



“  
 Many years  
 passed before I  
 realized beauty  
 was much more  
 than any fashion  
 ideal imposed on  
 us by society.  
 ”

This is what she sings,

*Ah, I laugh to see myself  
 so beautiful in this mirror,  
 Ah, I laugh to see myself  
 so beautiful in this mirror,  
 Is it you, Marguerite, is it you?  
 Answer me, answer me,  
 Respond, respond, respond quickly!  
 No! No! It's no longer you!  
 No... no, it's no longer your face;*

**It's the daughter of a king.<sup>2</sup>**

What does this all have to do with the Song of Solomon? You'll see in a minute.

When I was a teenager, I loved to read. A lot. Especially comics. I had a preference for Belgian comics, *Tintin* specifically. It was awesome because I learned about history and geography, as well as detective or diplomatic plots. There was this one character that appeared in several numbers of the *Tintin* series, Bianca Castafiore. Even though she was not one of the most relevant characters, I found her utterly paradoxical. She represented an Italian diva and opera singer, who had her own trademark rendition of the Jewel Song. I always found her funny because Hergé drew her as a hefty, somewhat obese lady, and, yet, she felt extremely beautiful in front of a mirror. Many years passed before I realized beauty was much more than any fashion ideal imposed on us by society (that is why I underestimated Bianca Castafiore's curves). I learned that beauty is grown from the inside out. Because beauty lies in the vicinity of much smarter eyes.

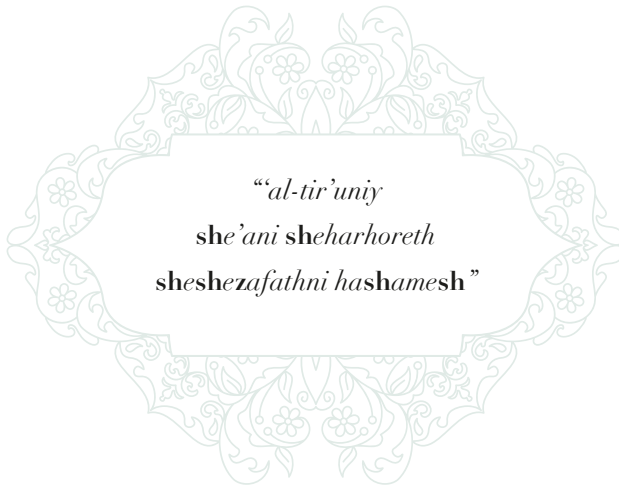
## I'M DARK, SO WHAT?

The Shulamite, the female protagonist of the *Song of Solomon*, was a country girl. And she did what country girls of her time did: work in the fields. Such an activity, evidently, made its mark on her physique: the softness of her hands (not so soft anymore), the tone of her muscles (very toned) and... the color of her skin (Wow! History repeats itself!). Having sun-tanned skin nowadays means—in Europe—that you belong to a superior social class (diving in the Maldives, surfing in Tarifa, sunbathing in Cancun or Mallorca), but it was not so at the time. Fair skin<sup>3</sup> was associated with the rich girls in Jerusalem, who did not expose themselves to the sun because working outside was a task only servants would do.

This girl looks at her skin, looks at the people around her, and tells them (allow me to update the text):

*“I'm dark, rich girls, but I'm attractive  
 Like a Speedy<sup>4</sup> bag by Louis Vuitton,  
 Like Audrey Hepburn's Givenchy  
 In Breakfast at Tiffany's.  
 Don't stare at the color of my skin  
 Because it is the sun that has darkened it.”*

How could she be attractive if she did not conform to the aesthetic norm of the time? The way she presents her “defect” already shows us her true character, her rich inner being. I want you to listen to this text in its original version. It goes like this:



Go on, read it out loud. Those are a lot of s's! And they are not there by chance. They are s's of "shhhhhh" (be quiet, your prejudice does not affect me); they are whispering s's because she doesn't need to shout or impose herself to show who she is; they are hissing s's that are more attractive than the song of a thousand sirens (and her lover must have felt spellbound when she talked like this). It's as if she were trying to let it be known that her external beauty is temporary and, on the inside, there is so much and so good. No wonder Solomon, in his unparalleled wisdom, did not allow her inner landscape to go unseen. As a result, he fell in love with that dark-skinned country girl with a multicolored heart.

## THE TYRANNY OF AESTHETICS

When you measure beauty by curves or straight lines, by symmetry or by how much skin you show, you sell yourself and others short. At best, these factors will end up objectifying people. It is true that it is very common, in our society of consumerism, to turn people into mere objects. But people are people and not objects. Objectifying others has short-term and long-term consequences. Feeling ashamed of oneself is one of those consequences. When we fall short of the beauty norms of the moment, we may end up feeling embarrassed and inhibited. Another consequence is the anxiety you feel when your body image is constantly under evaluation. And the ideal of beauty ends up being the only factor that gives value to a person. So sad and so wrong.

I must say it again, people are people, they are **not** things. That's why I'm fascinated by the Shulamite's courage when she declares that she is much more than skin: she is a human being who works, feels, loves, and deserves to be respected.

Consumer society teaches us—and even imposes on us—to recognize external beauty, but we should compensate this message with data that allows us to acknowledge beauty in its real sense. Let me share a few indicators to help you “discover” the inner beauty of others:

- › **Smile.** A smile says a lot about a human being. In fact, it makes us human. People say a smile is less expensive than electricity and yet shines so much brighter.
- › **Kindness.** It is not difficult to be nice and friendly. Social tension makes us forget that a kind word at the right time does much good and says a lot about us.
- › **Humor.** Seeing the world with joy—a coherent joy—allows us to not take secondary matters too seriously and to embrace what really matters. Humor is the escape valve that frees us from our own selves and our limitations.
- › **Gratitude.** A good person is grateful because they acknowledge the effort others make. Understanding others and showing gratitude turns us into respectable people.
- › **Generosity.** Generosity forces us to look beyond ourselves, to discover other people's needs and to do our part in the endless pool of solidarity.

“

It is true that it is very common, in our society of consumerism, to turn people into mere objects.

”



- > **Service.** A big heart is associated with big hands. Well, you know I'm just using a figure of speech here. What I'm saying is, if you are good on the inside, you are good on the outside. Look out for people with big hearts and you'll see I'm right.
- > **Authenticity.** Authenticity makes inner beauty shine so much brighter. First of all, accepting yourself as you are is a big step towards growth. Second, showing yourself as you are gives you real value; it does not devalue you as a person.
- > **Coherence.** If your words and your life match, give yourself a high score. Living in dissonance is, in the least, sad. It is also unsatisfying. A person who dares to live up to their ideals without giving in to social pressure inspires respect and appreciation.
- > **Transcendence.** There are inner beauties without a view. They are captured in the here and now, the fun, the endorphins. There are inner beauties with large windows: people who know how to look at the horizon without losing their position or their influence. We have the privilege as Christians to see the world through the lens of Jesus and the promises that give us a landscape of profundity.

## PERMANENT ATTRACTION

All that being said, what is the secret to permanent attraction? Someone will say, "Having a nice body." To which I would respond, "Great, you nailed it!" (Yes, that was sarcasm.) Okay, so physical attraction does have a point, but that's it, a simple point. Permanent attraction is built on much more than dotted lines. It is built with words, with significance, with expectation, with concrete and shared experiences.

Permanent attraction fixates itself on the singularity of both of the beloved. Pay attention to how the *Song of Solomon* spends a great deal of material speaking about the physical characteristics of both of the beloved. It does not say that Solomon likes

all the "babes," nor that the Shulamite likes all the "hunks." No. Solomon likes the Shulamite and the things that make her special to him. The Shulamite experiences the same thing with Solomon. The focal point of the loving gaze that produces permanent attraction is the beloved. Job, another wise person, says the following in Job 31:1, "I have made a covenant with my eyes; how then could I gaze at a virgin?" Job chose to look with the gaze of true love instead of the gaze of irregularity. That's how Solomon and the Shulamite looked at each other too.

Permanent attraction is established between people who share aspirations, projects, meaningful conversations, knowing looks and life experiences. Together, they build an inner landscape that compensates the physical deterioration over the years. There is a whole array of superficial and profound moments, of ideals and realities, which shape our character and allow us to recognize true beauty.

“

Together, they build an inner landscape that compensates the physical deterioration over the years.

”



### PRAYER OF THE DAY

Dear God, I admit that I sometimes rely only on what my eyes can see. Today, I ask you to help me see and appreciate the inner beauty of people. Help me to also cultivate my own inner beauty, in alignment with your values.

# QUESTIONS



- 1. What stood out for you from today's reading? Why?**

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- 2. "Because beauty lies in the vicinity of much smarter eyes." Also read Genesis 1:26-27 and Ephesians 2:10. How can you recognize true beauty? What determines the value of a person?**

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- 3. Have you ever felt looked down on by other people, like the Shulamite? Perhaps you know someone who has. Share your experience. What do you learn from the Shulamite regarding a healthy sense of self-worth?**

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- 4. What can we do, as individuals and as a church, to avoid and fight against any kind of discrimination, whether it is based on the color of people's skin, race, etc.? Think of 1-2 activities or initiatives and share them with the group.**

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## GO DEEPER

- › **Read** Song of Solomon 1:5-7. The Shulamite asserts her own beauty, whilst at the same time being vulnerable. How do you see yourself? What do you want others to see in you? Write your own version of this text, following the Shulamite's example.
- › **Read** Song of Solomon 1:8-11. How does Solomon respond to the Shulamite? Pay attention to the details. What does this teach you about the importance of our words?
- › **Research** the beauty norms of the time, and compare them with those of our time. Use Bible commentaries and dictionaries, contact your pastor or a friend who is a historian, or ask help from your mentor. End this exercise by defining your own beauty norms, based on today's topic.
- › **Reflect:** "We still bear the image of our God, if only faintly. [...] As we grow in holiness, love, goodness, justice, mercy, grace, faith, patience, truth, and wisdom, we look increasingly like Christ, who looks exactly like God. Becoming better people is the process of reflecting with increasing clarity and fidelity the very face of God."<sup>5</sup>
- › **Watch** this TedTalk by Brené Brown about vulnerability: "The power of vulnerability."  
<http://bit.ly/thepowerofvulnerabilityBB>
- › **Pray:** Ask God to help you develop a character that reflects His beauty. Confess those things that make your character "ugly."



## PERSONAL CHALLENGE

Today, we have read a list of **9 indicators of true beauty** (smile, kindness, humor, gratitude, generosity, service, authenticity, coherence and transcendence). Write them down in a notebook, on a sheet of paper or in your phone's notes app.

Over the next **9 days**, let's work on each of those indicators, one per day. Take some minutes each morning to reflect on how you could put the indicator of the day into practice. Here are a few examples: **Smile** to everyone who crosses your path; be **kind** to the cashier when you go to the supermarket this afternoon; show some **good humor** when you talk to your "annoying" neighbor; be **grateful** when someone helps you, however small the help may be... As you do this, you will realize that beauty is way beyond the surface and aesthetics.





# ACTIVITIES



## ACTIVITY 1: TEMPERATURE TEST

### Materials:

- › A giant thermometer drawn on a large paper (with a zero at the bottom, and a ten at the top), 1 post-it per person and 1 pen per person.
- › A printed copy of the test of part 2 of this activity.

### Activity Description

#### Part 1

Put your hand over your heart and imagine that you are measuring your beauty using a thermometer. Give your beauty a grade between 0 and 10 (zero is not beautiful at all and ten is very beautiful). Write your grade on your post-it and stick it on the giant thermometer, at the height of your grade. (You can stick the post-it's anonymously, it is not necessary for others to see what grade you give yourself. The important part of this activity is the visual impact of looking at the thermometer with everyone's post-it stuck on it, as well as the personal reflection time after part 2.)

#### Part 2

Let's measure your beauty based on the parameters we learned of in today's text.

	Never 0 points	Some- times 1 points	Many times 2 points	Always 3 points
I smile				
I act in a <b>kind</b> way				
I see the world with a good sense of <b>humor</b>				
I act in <b>gratitude</b>				
I act in <b>generosity</b>				
I selflessly <b>serve</b> others				
I am <b>authentic</b> , I show my true self to others				
I am <b>coherent</b> in the way I act				
I live life with a <b>transcendent</b> perspective				

Now add up all of your points, divide them by 27 and multiply by 10. What grade of beauty did you get? Is this grade similar to the one you gave yourself on the thermometer? How does this affect the way you think about your true beauty?

### Application

We often give little value to what really matters about a person. Since we are little, we are taught that what's important is on the inside, not on the outside. What we will take to heaven is our character, the way we are, the way we treat others, not the way we look or what we own. This does not mean that we should not take care of our physical body, since we should do all things for the honor and glory of God (1 Corinthians 10:31). That means we must do our best to lead a healthy life. However, when it comes to evaluating whether a person is beautiful or not, we need to look further, we need to spend time with them, to talk... in order to see if they are really beautiful on the inside. Perhaps this activity helped you realize that you are more beautiful than you thought. Perhaps the opposite happened. The key is that you now continue to cultivate the beauty parameters that are valuable in God's eyes.

## ACTIVITY 2: IT'S NOT ABOUT WHAT I HAVE, BUT ABOUT WHO I AM

Please use the link below or scan the QR code with your mobile device to go to Activity 2:

<https://bit.ly/MagnaOperaDownloads>





# The Best Love



**KEY TEXT:** Song  
of  
Solomon  
1:12-2:7

You walk with such poise! Your cheeks are lovely  
between your braids. Your neck, enhanced by  
jewels, is so beautiful.

Song of Solomon 1:9-11

**W**e experience a massive short-circuit in our brains when we read in the Bible (in the Bible!) a verse about sex. How can it be that a book that is supposed to lift us up spiritually talks about such “carnal” things? Something’s wrong. And we end up thinking that what is wrong is in the inspired text when, perhaps, the disconnection is actually in our minds.

*“What? Impossible! We are the most evolved culture in history. Our thinking is the most elaborate of all,”*

you tell yourself.

*“Well, that’s not exactly the way it is,”*

I tell you.

*“You’ll have to prove that to me,”*

you respond.

*“Okay, but you’ll have to pay close attention because this really needs your focus,”*

I answer.

And so, I answer. It looks like it all began with a man called Plato and with his views about the world and human beings. This philosopher believed that our nature was dual (in other words, it could be divided into two parts). One part was the soul and the other, the body. The soul existed before the body and it could also occupy different bodies throughout its existence (something similar to reincarnation; he called it *metempsychosis*). The soul (especially the part of it that was called *logistike*) was related to everything that was superior, whilst the body was associated with everything that was inferior. In this way, all that was “spiritual” was good and desirable (in the most elevated sense

of the word), whilst the “carnal” was not as good, although desirable for many (in the lustful sense of the term).

*“Hey, are you following what I’m saying?”*

I ask you.

*“Yes, but be more specific,”*

you tell me.

To sum up, everything relating to what is spiritual or intellectual is good and everything relating to the body, not so much. This idea was picked up by a Christian thinker called Tertullian, who said, “Since everything relating to the body is bad, sex is extremely bad.” (Those were not his words exactly, but they’re close enough).

*“Did people believe him?”*

you ask.

*“Up to our days,”*

I respond. *“But the Bible is not dualist. What is ‘spiritual’ is as good as what relates to the body,”*

I add.

*“Tell me more,”*

I hope you add.

Yes, the *Song of Solomon* talks about sex with absolute normality because, in its proper place (bear this in mind), it is absolutely normal. And, I would dare say, desirable. As I said, in its proper place.



## Nine High Cs

Gaetano Donizetti once wrote an opera entitled, *La fille du régiment* (*The Daughter of the Regiment*). It tells the story of an abandoned girl, Marie, who is adopted by a regiment of soldiers, the Twenty-First Regiment. Given her condition, she could only marry someone from the group of soldiers. However, she meets Tonio, a young Tyrolean man, and love blooms between them. Tonio becomes a part of the Regiment and, with evident emotion, sings one of the most difficult arias ever (*Ah! mes amis, quell jour de fête!* [*Ah, my friends, what an exciting day!*]). This piece requires 9 high Cs to be sung. That's a beast! Only Pavarotti could do that. By the way, Luciano Pavarotti became famous in 1972 when he sang this piece in the Metropolitan Opera House in New York as if he were singing an ordinary reggaeton song by Luis Fonsi (apologies for this comparison).

Tonio sings his high Cs, he gives his all for his love.

And that is what the *Song of Solomon* is about: it's about giving your all for your true love. Your all? Isn't that unhealthy? You're right, I need to put this into context.

- › Giving your all does not only refer to having sex or "making love." You don't make love, you live love. What's more, it's sad to find people who identify the expression "give yourself to someone" with sexual intercourse. "Giving your all" is not synonymous of "a wild night of passion." Those who think only about flesh, about sex without context, are missing out on so much.
- › Giving your all does not imply that you stop being yourself. You can only give what you have, so you can only keep giving if you keep having. Growing as a person is a nonnegotiable right. What is negotiable is the amount of collaboration for growth from the person you love and who loves you back.
- › Giving your all requires an environment of commitment, responsibility, dialogue, healthy intimacy and generosity. When I say "environment" I mean this is not a one-person thing.

When Solomon mentions the Shulamite's tresses (something super sensual in his culture, see *Song of Solomon* 7:5), he is not talking about a fleeting moment of passion brought on by some hormonal stimulus. He refers to an intimate relationship in the context of a personal and public commitment as a couple. A commitment that has been mediated by God. And, as a result of that intimacy, it is possible to develop a more mature and generous individual character.

## Living Love as a Couple

You are possibly thinking that you would like to live an experience like the one I just described. You probably think I will now give you a recipe with the steps you need to take in order to "live love" instead of "make love." But the truth is there is no recipe because the ingredients (us) are so varied and interesting that we cannot limit ourselves to a few measures. What I can do, if that is okay with you, is make a few suggestions based on what I have discovered over the last decades.

First of all, **information**. It is fundamental that a couple know one another. That is why it is so important that we exchange our "history," i.e., the tales from our past. Why? Because you need to learn about the life of the person you are interested in so that you can contextualize them. For example, she is terrified of turtles because the one she had as a pet attacked her when she was a child. He hates soy sauce because he once had an allergic reaction to Pad Thai at the restaurant around the corner. She has a crazy love for sphynx cats because her grandmother gave her one when she was a little girl. He thoroughly enjoys tofu smeared with sweet-and-sour sauce because he once tried it during potluck at church and, since then, life has never been the same. If you have this information, you will obviously gift a skinny cat before a girl-attacking chelonian.<sup>1</sup> You'll cook a vegan dinner for tofu-loving *foodies* and avoid noodles and chicken that have a Thai flair. It makes sense. You know, so you act in accordance with what you know.

Discovering the "other" in this way will result in you figuring out their **singularity**, that is, what makes them different and special to you. You will not agree on everything, but you will feel affinity for their peculiarities. Even if you yourself do not possess any of those peculiarities, and they simply complement you. What is it I'm talking about? I mean the movement of that eyebrow when she questions you. That look of trust and longing. That way of telling a story. That way of facing challenges. That intense and genuine way of embracing you. Those are the sort of details that make that person different from anyone else—someone very special to you.

If you read the *Song of Solomon*, you will be surprised by the amount of singularities each of the protagonists point out. They start with the physical attributes (which are, by the way, a lot, when compared to how much the Bible tends to focus on descriptions) and move on to express details about behavior and thought. Sometimes, when I read those verses, they seem a bit too cheesy. But, I have to admit, when it comes to talking about my wife, Esther, I think I'm probably a bit cheesy myself. That is just the way it is with love.

“

Tonio sings his high Cs,  
he gives his all for his  
*love.*

And that is what the  
Song of Solomon is about: it's  
about giving your all for your  
*true love.*

”

“  
Your expressions are filled  
with a significance that only  
the two of you  
*comprehend.*  
”



### Prayer of the day

Dear God, thank you for creating sex as something good and desirable, in its proper place. Help me understand your vision on sexuality and help me live a fulfilling life as a result.

Moving on to the second point: **commitment**. Once we have evaluated the facts or information (and the accompanying emotions), it is time to think about how involved we are going to be in this relationship we are just starting to pursue. In his book *Liquid Love*, Zygmunt Bauman explains that this is one of the problems of our society. He states that we are really good at connecting, but we are terrified of the word “commitment.” Bauman gives an excellent diagnosis of reality, but there is no reason for us to settle for a diagnosis. Christianity and commitment go hand in hand. Christ calls us to commit our lives to others because that is how He lived and died: making a commitment, getting involved. We all need our own space, that’s for sure. It is the way we are, we need to find ourselves. But it is also part of our being to share spaces because we are social beings. In fact, we are beings who have been designed to interact and be committed to others.

In addition to stability in the couple, commitment produces one of the most fascinating experiences in life: **mutual understanding**. It is beyond spectacular—once a relationship goes beyond mere information and moves on to an experience of shared existence—to understand the profound meaning that a simple gaze, a mere gesture or a key word holds. Expressions filled with a significance that only the two of you comprehend. You cannot miss out on this for fear of making a commitment.

Finally, **intimacy**. Nudity (both physical and emotional) has its place in intimacy. The gaze of intimacy is not a skin-deep, superficial gaze, it is a gaze of depth and profundity. Sporadic and decontextualized sex shies away from intimacy because it only focuses on pleasure. Correct and contextualized sex embraces the person in the most intimate part of their being. The sex that the *Song of Solomon* poses is sex that occurs in the intimacy of a marriage, in an edifying and healthy relationship. Sex is good and desirable, in spite of what Tertullian and his followers have said. God likes for us to live love in all of its dimensions, enjoying them all, and giving our all.



# QUESTIONS



- 1. What stood out for you from today's reading? Why?**

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- 2. How relevant is what the Bible says about sex and intimacy in your personal decisions? Does it have any authority over your decisions? Why or why not?**

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- 3. Read Song of Solomon 2:7, Genesis 2:24 and Ephesians 5:31-32. Were you surprised? What impact do these passages have on the way you see sex? How do they help you understand the "proper place" for sex?**

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- 4. Read and discuss the following statements:**

**"We live in a world where sexual and romantic fulfillment are paraded as ultimate goods. Miss out on sex, we are told, you miss out on life..."<sup>2</sup> and "In modern society, we are led to believe we cannot live without sex. In fact, I believe we are more likely to wither without friend and family love."<sup>3</sup>**

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## GO DEEPER

- › **Read** Song of Solomon 1:12-2:7 several times. This section could be entitled “The Anticipation of Marriage.” What progression do you see in Solomon’s and the Shulamite’s relationship? Underline or highlight all the metaphors and descriptions of each one. What stands out for you? Why?
- › **Research** how many times the phrase of Song of Solomon 2:7 occurs in the book. (Hint: see chapters 3 and 8.) Read these three verses in several Bible versions, for example, NKJV, ESV, NLT and NIV.<sup>4</sup> Pay attention to the nuances in each of the translations. Read a few Bible commentaries on these three passages (ask your pastor or your mentor for help). Reflect on the following:
  - The phrase “**by the gazelles or the does of the field**” is an oath that appears three times in the whole book.
  - In the original Hebrew language, this phrase sounds similar to the names of God “Elohe Sabbaoth” and “El Shaddai,” which means this phrase is to be interpreted as an oath made before God.
  - This oath entails making the promise to wait until the time is right to awaken love, and, in this context, sex (read the passages in NLT).<sup>5</sup>
- › **Reflect:** What kind of image does the Bible share about sex? Is it positive or negative? What is God’s purpose for sex? Give arguments for your answer. Ask your pastor or your mentor for help.
- › **Read** 1 Corinthians 6:9-20. What does Paul bring to the table on the topic of sexuality?
- › **Watch** or **organize** a talk or seminar on the Bible and sexuality. Ask your youth director, pastor or mentor for recommendations. What are your conclusions?
- › **Pray:** Open your heart to God about your expectations, desires, fears and difficulties regarding sex. Ask Him for wisdom and strength to make good decisions about sex.



## PERSONAL CHALLENGE

Think about your favorite series, movies or sitcoms. There’s probably a love story or intimate relationship in most if not all of them. Take a few minutes to think about what each relationship is like. Haven’t we all imagined living out that story ourselves? But, does what we consume share the principles of profound love we read about today?

The challenge for today is for you to block some time in your schedule (a morning or an afternoon) to reflect on and decide what you want for your love/dating/marriage relationship (present or future) in the light of today’s topic. Make an intentional plan to put your decision into practice. Lean on the counsel of friends and mentors. Read a book about the topic. Clearly define why you make the decision you make, why it is important to you, and why you want to accomplish it. Pray so that you can live your present or future relationship in alignment with these principles.





# ACTIVITIES



## ACTIVITY 1: “TWO” WHO GIVE THEIR ALL

**Materials:** White or colored cardboard, scissors, clear sticker paper, erasable whiteboard markers, a table. Voice recording app (optional).

### Activity Description

This activity may be done individually, in couples or in a group.

- › **Preparation:** Draw and cut out 9 “C” musical notes from the cardboard. Use the clear sticker paper to wrap each note on both sides (front and back). Divide the notes in three groups of three. If your group is bigger, you can always make more notes, always a multiple of 9. Behind each of the musical notes, each person will use an erasable marker to write a different kind of word at the back of each note: write a verb on 3 notes, a common noun on the next 3 notes, and a proper noun on the last 3 notes. If you have any notes left, repeat the process. Also draw different clefs (treble clef, bass clef, alto clef...), wrap them with the clear sticker paper and write these words on the back: “Commitment,” “Responsibility,” “Conversation,” “Healthy intimacy,” and “Generosity.” These will be the “keywords” and should be left on one side of the table. Let’s begin!
- › **Allegro con motto Part:** Place the “C” musical notes face down on the table and shuffle them. Each participant will now take turns to stand up, read the words and make up a story using the words that appear, taking a new word/note per turn to add to the story. The important thing here is not so much the content of the story, but rather to tell the story swiftly, without overthinking it and avoiding any corrections, judgment or changes in the plot. There is only one condition: to include the phrase “give all” or “give your all” (and similar combinations) in the plot. Optionally, you could record the whole story using your voice recording app.
- › **Adagio riflessivo Part:** We will now try to recall the invented story as a reflection exercise, whether as individuals or

as a group. We will focus on the different events described. At this time, we will uncover each of the clefs, one by one, and reflect on the keyword and how it relates to the made-up story. For example: How do the protagonists of the story reflect “Commitment”? Can they change any of their actions to display more “Responsibility”? Etc.

### Application:

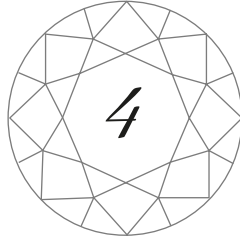
As Víctor explains in the *Loveliest Song*, giving your all for true love is not a decision to take lightly, nor should it be made in a rush or without giving it much thought. Giving your all in a relationship, so that it “sounds and resounds” the way it should, requires **reflection**, **confidence** behind each note you play, **fine tuning** to the ideal clef and the ability to follow the **bars** of the divine baton.

## ACTIVITY 2: SINGULARS IN PLURAL

Please use the link below or scan the QR code with your mobile device to go to Activity 2:

<https://bit.ly/MagnaOperaDownloads>





# *The Purest Kind*



**KEY TEXT:**

*Song of Solomon 2:8-3:5*

**E**venings in the Mediterranean weather have a special flavor. The light turns golden and the shadows, long and calm, invite you to reflect. During the summertime, the persistent heat gives way to the breeze of the evening hours. Time devoted to work loses its meaning and is replaced by time spent with family, friends, and one's significant other. Watching the sun set or talking about divine and human realities is something to look forward to in the afternoon.

I can see Solomon and the Shulamite sitting on a rock, watching the sun set behind the hills. Solomon casually tells his beloved that behind those lightly sunbathed mountains lies the great sea. He talks to her about his projects with the northern coast kingdoms, how they work with wood and how he plans to build a temple for God. She looks at him, captivated by his eyes, and draws the courage to ask about the customs of those people, how they dress... Are their women beautiful?

*We are made  
for each other.  
Return to me, my beloved,  
Along with the breeze and  
the shadows of the eve.  
Song of Solomon 2:16*

Solomon smiles, and lovingly responds:

*“They are beautiful, but not as beautiful as you. You are unique.”*

“You say that to everyone,”  
the Shulamite reproaches in return.

*“You know that is not true. I have eyes for you only, my dove. You are beautiful and your voice is so sweet...”*

“You are doing it again.”

*“I’m doing it again?”*

“Be honest. Are we made for each other?”  
she daringly asks.

*“We are made for each other;”*  
*Solomon responds with*  
*absolute certainty.*

I suspect that in that moment of pure and sincere love, their hands brushed against each other and an electrifying explosion of emotions invaded their souls. When you stay away from the uncertainties of distrust, it is so much easier to enjoy the breeze and the long shadows of eve.

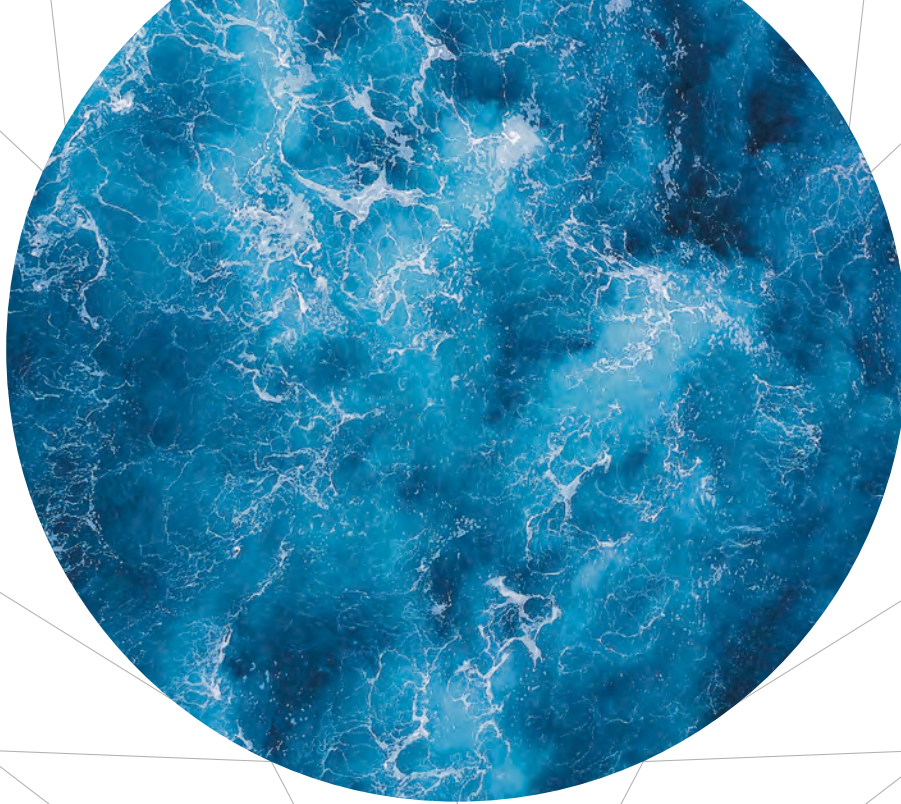


## *Solomon versus Mozart?*

Solomon’s opera talks about purity, unlike Mozart’s *Don Giovanni*. On October 29, 1787, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart’s opera, *The Libertine Punished or Don Giovanni*, premiered. The piece is about Don Juan, a literary prototype of a seducer, famously known for disregarding the norms of morality and fidelity in love affairs. Don Giovanni is associated with many adjectives (libertine, arrogant, promiscuous, indecent) that have become a reference for many people. Being called a “Don Juan” or a “Casanova” (by the way, Giacomo Casanova attended the premiere of the opera in Prague) seems to be considered a compliment in our society. Many people’s value is measured by the number of their conquests and being an emotional predator is even desirable.

But this goes against the message of the Bible. In the Word of God, good lovers are described using other adjectives (those of purity, innocence, integrity, loyalty, decency). They are so interesting and such great ingredients for healthy relationships that it’s worth our while to talk about them. So, we are going to focus on them from five perspectives:

- › **What’s mine versus what’s ours.** There is a time to think only of ourselves and there is a time to include the person we love. As a child, it is normal to think only of yourself. As you grow up, you learn that there are spaces to be shared and thoughts to be comprehended. We move on from thinking only of ourselves to enjoying relationships with others. Don Giovanni did not grow out of the first stage. He lives in the tyranny of his ego. The *Song of Solomon* presents, in an organic way, a relationship of sharing (look, for example, how the word “our” is used throughout the book: 1:16-17; 2:9, 12, 15; 7:13). In a healthy relationship, “what’s ours” is the foundation.



› **The unclear versus the transparent.** Personal relationships are like water. If it's transparent, we trust we can drink it; if it's muddy, we think twice before having a drink. Don Giovanni employs artifice and deceit in his attempts at seduction. This irregular way of acting will lead him to existential failure. The *Song of Solomon* stands out for its clarity. So much so, we sometimes feel it's too much (remember our recent talk about sexuality). Why? Because innocence is the right way to look. When the text says the Shulamite has eyes like doves (1:15), it is talking about that innocence and that healthy way of looking. It alludes to the Garden of Eden, where Adam and Eve walked naked, but did not feel naked. A healthy relationship of love always goes back to Eden, to the moment when sin did not exist. That is where we find the true nature of love relationships. Purity was the usual there. And, in the future, in the New Earth, things will be like that again. Shouldn't we start practicing for such an anticipated moment?

› **The dirty versus the clean.** Perhaps you read the last paragraph and now feel sad because, for whatever reasons, you are muddy with irregularity. If so, you are in the right place. The Bible does not present a list of perfect and immaculate saints. On the contrary, it shares the examples of many lives that got dirty. Unlike the *reality shows*, which thrive on dirt, the Bible invites us to be cleansed. In this sense, I want to share Psalm 73 with you. In this song, Asaph thinks that he cannot be clean and pure again (v. 13), but he reaches the conclusion that things are not that way with God, "But for me it is good to be near God; I have made the Lord God my refuge, that I may tell of all your works" (v. 28). Even if your life has been like a "4x4,"<sup>2</sup> God gives you the opportunity to live "1x1" (you and Him, and then, you and your significant other).

“

*Personal relationships are like water. If it's transparent, we trust we can drink it; if it's muddy, we think twice before having a drink.*

”

› **The vulgar versus the elegant.** There was a time when, due to the influence of platonic love, romanticism made a show of courteous manners (I would call them cheesy). Nowadays, thanks to the influence of consumer love, the vulgar has staged a coup. What should be private has been explicitly "fleshed" out (I know I should think twice about my word choice here, because this is precisely what pornography sells: flesh). Don Giovanni has taken over the story, and the vulgar is the new normal. The *Song of Solomon*, however, invites us to be elegant. When Solomon talks to the Shulamite he explains



that the way she speaks is as sweet as honey (4:11). In an exercise of delicacy and humility, she compares herself with saffron (or the rose of Sharon, 2:1) and a lily—a simple, yet beautiful flower. There is no need for flashiness, for she embellishes everything with her simplicity. Having this perspective in mind, I encourage you to embrace the *Elegantia Revolution* (I am not encouraging a fight of the classes here, but rather to have a bit more class). Enough with the vulgarity!

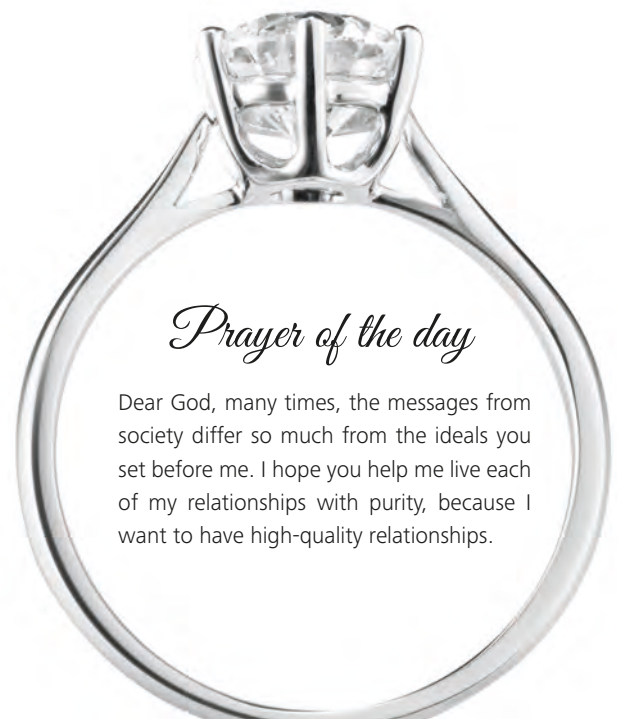
- › **The dark versus the light.** Many young people play with love relationships as if they were playing with a *piñata*:<sup>3</sup> eyes closed and shooting in the dark. Sometimes they succeed, other times, they miss. It's normal for Don Giovanni to live in the darkness of his feelings because he has decided to inhabit the irregular. But that's not us. We have the Light and we must be light. We cannot permanently live based on confusion or subjectivity because we have access to the Light. *Song of Solomon* 8:6 mentions a very powerful flame called "the flame of the Lord." True love shines and grows warm because its flame comes from God. It would make no sense to have access to this wisdom and ignore it. You simply need to turn on the "switch" that is Jesus and you will see everything in a different light.

Final score: Team Don Giovanni = 0 / Team Song of Solomon = 5.

“  
*True love shines and  
 grows warm because  
 its flame comes from God.*  
 ”

I know which team I'm in. Why? Are you still doubtful? Because I prefer a love that frees me from my ego and allows me to enjoy the freedom of you. Because I am sick of putting up with things I don't see or want to live by. I want to feel the peace of mind that comes from being honest. Because I am tired of feeling the wound of guilt and I want to look at my partner as light and as clean as I can. Because I am fed up with the vulgarity and I know I am designed for high-quality relationships. Because I'm tired of stumbling, I want to know where I stand and what I bring into a relationship so that it is healthy (and, I hope, redeeming as well). Nothing can top that. I want to—as lovey-dovey as it sounds—live on pure love. Don't even dare to hesitate: live on pure love. I'll go even further: What if we tattoo that on our arm and on our heart? (*Song of Solomon* 8:6).

P.S.: I'm kidding about the arm tattoo. But the heart we do need to seal ASAP. Will you join me?



*Prayer of the day*

Dear God, many times, the messages from society differ so much from the ideals you set before me. I hope you help me live each of my relationships with purity, because I want to have high-quality relationships.

# QUESTIONS



1. **What stood out for you from today's reading? Why?**

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2. **Victor talks about five perspectives to consider regarding the purest love: what society suggests vs. what the Bible recommends. What do you think about each of his proposals?**

**What's mine versus what's ours.** \_\_\_\_\_

**The unclear versus the transparent.** \_\_\_\_\_

**The dirty versus the clean.** \_\_\_\_\_

**The vulgar versus the elegant.** \_\_\_\_\_

**The dark versus the light.** \_\_\_\_\_

3. **"I know I am designed for high-quality relationships." How would you define a high-quality relationship? How does this impact the way you relate with other people?**

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4. **Victor suggests we should embrace relationships through the eyes of purity. What does 1 Timothy 5:1-2 also teach us about how to relate to one another?**

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## GO DEEPER

- › **Read** Song of Solomon 2:8-3:5 at least a couple of times. Underline or highlight everything that draws your attention.
  - Is there any repetition? Where and what?
  - Song of Solomon 2:11-13 talks about a change in season. What parallelisms can you draw between this season change and the different phases in a friendship/dating/marriage relationship?
  - **Research:** what could the foxes in Song of Solomon 2:15 represent? And the vineyards?
  - Solomon and the Shulamite feel an intense desire to find each other (3:1-2), although they also know they must wait until the time is right (2:7; 3:5; 8:4). Do you think it is a good and positive thing to feel sexual attraction for your partner/boyfriend/girlfriend? Why or why not? What do you learn from Song of Solomon about how to deal with this sexual attraction?
- › **Read** Song of Solomon 2:16 again. What do you learn from the Shulamite's statement?
  - You can turn this verse into art, *lettering*, poem or song.
- › **Read** Song of Solomon 3:1-5. This is the first dream we find in Song of Solomon.
  - What effect does the repetition in verses 1 and 2 produce? How is the tension that they introduce resolved?
  - Focus on Song of Solomon 3:4. Is the Shulamite dreaming about consummating her marriage with her beloved, or is she looking to protect it until the wedding day (see 1:4; 3:5; 8:2)?
- › **Read** John 8:1-11. Maybe you have not always lived up to God's ideal. What does this encounter between Jesus and the woman caught in adultery teach you about forgiveness and grace? And about second chances?
- › **Pray:** Open your heart to God and tell Him about your relationships (friendship/dating/marriage). Ask Him for wisdom to live truly high-quality relationships. Invite the Holy Spirit to give you clarity to see what you need to change or improve.



## PERSONAL CHALLENGE

Make a list of the five versus statements Víctor shared in the text. You can also transform them into a drawing or a lettering exercise. The important thing is to take time to analyze the ways your relationships reflect the principles Solomon shares in Song of Solomon and the ways they don't. Take note of this by giving yourself a tick either on *Team Solomon* or *Team Don Giovanni*.

Now visualize the specific moments in your relationships in which you did not live out the principles of Song of Solomon. What can you do to implement these principles? Think of concrete examples and set yourself a few goals to accomplish in the next 72 hours. What is your next step? Pray to God and ask Him to help you change all the ticks on this list and move them to *Team Solomon*.





# ACTIVITIES



## ACTIVITY 1: WATER FILTER

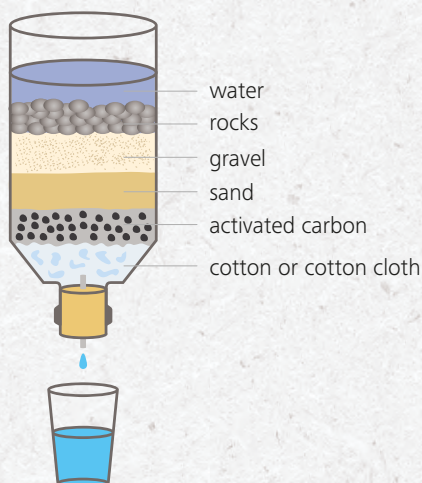
### Materials:

1. A transparent plastic bottle with a lid
2. A cup of soil
3. A cup of sand/gravel
4. A cup of pebbles/rocks
5. A knife
6. Cotton or cotton cloth
7. Activated carbon (optional)

### Activity Description

Underground water naturally gets filtered when it goes through different layers of soil, rocks, gravel, and sand. As the water travels through these layers, the impurities it carries are filtered, until it reaches a greater degree of purity.

For this activity, we are going to make a homemade water filter with a transparent plastic bottle and a few materials:



1. Make a hole on the bottle lid and close the bottle.
2. Cut the bottom of the bottle at a height of approximately 2cm.
3. Put the bottle upside down and introduce the following materials in layers, in this order: cotton, activated carbon, sand, soil, pebbles/rocks.
4. Pour water with impurities on the top layer and watch how it gets filtered as it travels through the different layers, until it reaches a greater degree of purity.

### Application

We often go through different situations in life that make us feel like we have a “pebble in our shoe.” The good thing is such situations can help us grow and leave the harmful elements behind.

Take some time to reflect with God. Talk to Him about what you are currently experiencing in your friendship/dating/marriage relationship. Ask Him to show you how each of these relationships can help you “purify” the rough edges of your character.

## ACTIVITY 2: REAL FOOD

Please use the link below or scan the QR code with your mobile device to go to Activity 2:

<https://bit.ly/MagnaOperaDownloads>





# *The Most Profitable Contract*

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KEY TEXT:

*Song of Solomon 3:6-11 and Psalm 45*

*Go out and look upon King Solomon, daughters of Zion. He is wearing the crown his mother made for him for the happiest day of his life.*



This is how the trailer started for the highest grossing romantic film of 2008, *Mamma Mia*. Its ingredients were perfect for success: music by ABBA, a Greek island called Kalokairi (fictitious, but gorgeous, as can be expected from a Greek island), a young couple who wants to get married and the question of who actually is the bride's father. As expected, it was a great success. The sequel came ten years later: *Mamma Mia! Here We Go Again*. Results: \$349 million dollars in revenue.

We could say that its ingredients were similar to those of another romantic musical that inspired generations: *The Sound of Music* (with Julie Andrews and Christopher Plummer). However, there is a huge difference between them: over the years, society's views of marriage had changed. Between 1965 (*The Sound of Music*) and 2018, this social institution had undergone a considerable deterioration, which is interesting because many people actually dream of having the perfect wedding, while the concept of marriage increasingly loses its value at the same time. Consider this interesting ratio: the pomposity of a wedding vs. the length of a marriage. I've had the opportunity of officiating at many weddings and I have noticed how the celebrations are becoming more and more spectacular, while the bonds of commitment get weaker and weaker.

Narrator:  
*Every girl has a dream.*

Sophie:  
*I want the perfect wedding and I want my father to give me away.*

Source: *Mamma Mia*

That same year, 2018, Kate Smurthwaite, a British comedian, made the following statement on *Good Morning Britain*, "Marriages should be entered into in the same way as a 24-month phone contract."<sup>1</sup> She added, "If you've got a mobile phone and it's costing you £80 a month and you see you can get the same deal for £25 a month, I'd say go for it. If you're in a relationship with somebody who takes you out for dinner once a month and you've got the offer of somebody who takes you out for dinner twice a week, I say good for you. You only live once."

"A wedding — with God as a guest — is the dream of every girl or boy in the Bible."



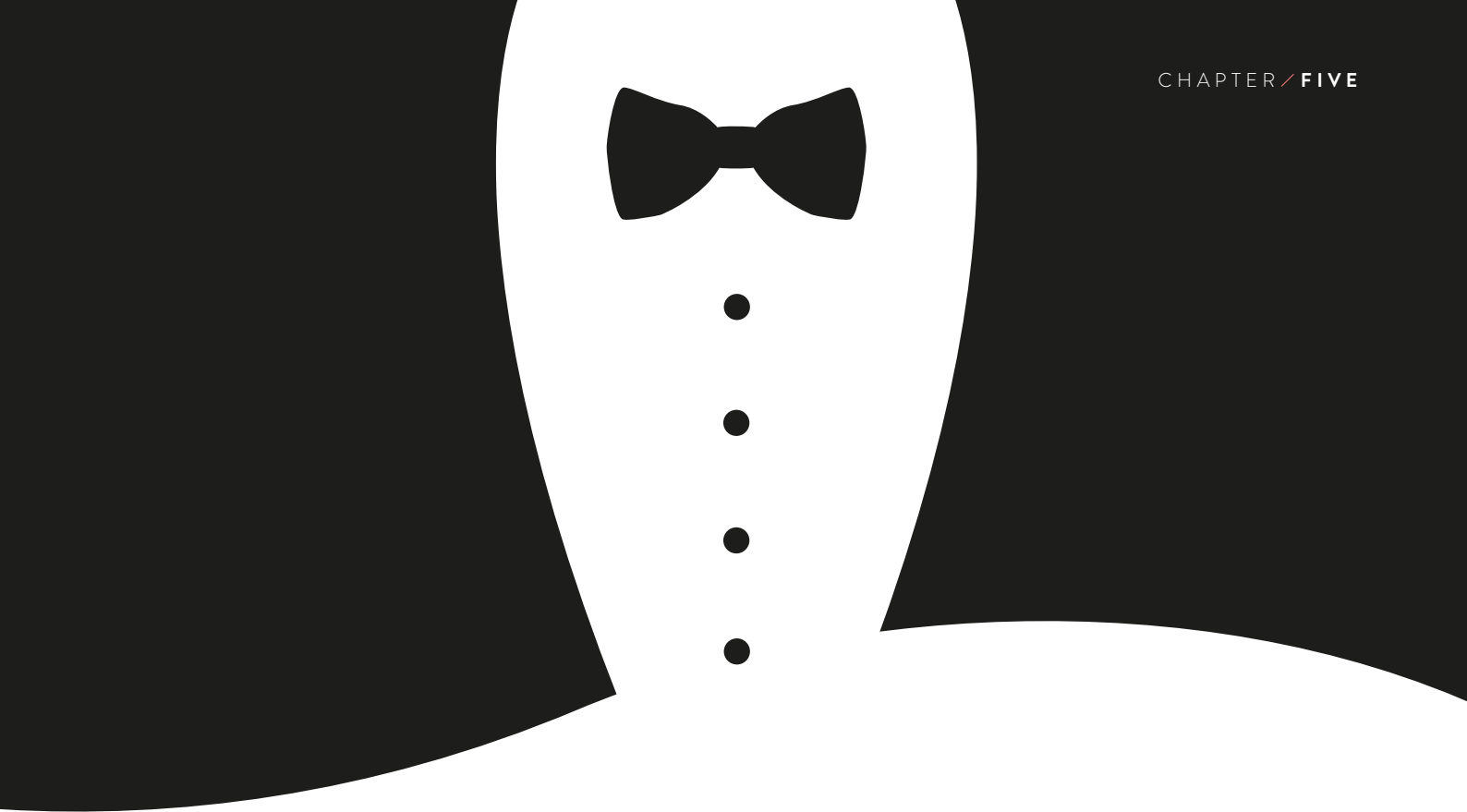
People reacted immediately, making comments such as:

- › **Ironic:** *Getting divorced is easier than cancelling your phone contract.*
- › **Fundamentalist:** *Honestly, people, you don't have to get married to f\*\*\*... Stop making fun of the institution of marriage!*
- › **Purist:** *A cohabitation contract is like being common law partners. So, let's not call it a marriage. This is a provocation. And what she's putting forward is nothing new. There are thousands of single people who jump from relationship to relationship throughout life.*
- › **Dogmatic:** *Marriage should be until death do us part. Then there are those who approach marriage as a game. A marriage is about surrender and fidelity, commitment and effort, a life project that has no expiration date. The problem is not marriage, the problem are the people who approach marriage as a game, and thus fail to make a commitment or an effort; those who don't know what the sense and definition of marriage is. Don't get married, period.*

As I read this, I couldn't help thinking about some people I know who say the exact same things. It is clear that the romantic spirit of society is at war with its fear of commitment. And our reaction should not be to distance ourselves from others as a result of our sarcasm, nor should it be a terrorist-religious attack. It shouldn't be a declamation of the Dictionary of Tongues (those tongues that love to spread gossip) or of doctrine number "x" of System-

atic Theology. Why? Because people find themselves in a confusing, weak spot and what they need is the best of us and our ideals. I see it every day in the way they express what hurts them the most, even though they don't always manage to say things the way they are and turn to soft words (euphemisms) instead. They prefer "temporary cease in living together" to "divorce;" or "decrease in passion" to "marriage crisis;" or "readjustment of feelings" to "loss of love;" or—this is a significant one—"experience improvement" to "infidelity;" or "open relationship" to "a relationship devoid of faithfulness." And within the very texts that include these phrases you find links to articles such as: "The five secrets to make your relationship last," "How to make sure your partner doesn't cheat on you," "How to lead a happy marriage," etc. These people need help, no doubt.

During my time as a PhD student in Tongues<sup>2</sup> (the other kind of tongues, the ones of the Bible), I had a colleague who lived together with her boyfriend. She was a smart, proactive and youthful woman until the topic of her relationship came up. Her expression would dramatically change. One day, during a break, she opened up to the rest of the colleagues and admitted she dreamed of getting married, but, at the same time, felt terrified about it. "Why?" asked one of the doctoral students



who focused on Arabic. “Because if I propose, our relationship will probably be over,” she replied with a deep sense of dread. The conversation ended there. I returned home with no irony, no radical thoughts, no terminological clarifications (which are more of an addiction for me), no list of Bible verses. Instead, I returned home with sadness. The discourse of society is one thing, even if it is disguised in an ABBA song; its reality is another thing. Because the story includes much more loneliness, frustration, insecurity, and dissatisfaction than it lets on.

## A Party in Style

The Bible is famous for associating weddings with parties. A wedding—with God as a guest—is the dream of every girl or boy in the Bible. In fact, the most remarkable text in *Song of Solomon* is the description of Solomon’s and the Shulamite’s wedding. The dreams of the young country girl (Song of Solomon 2:8-9) are fulfilled in a spectacular moment, much more appealing and picturesque than a wedding in a Greek island (with all that implies!), with an exquisite attention to detail and plenty of extravagance (Song of Solomon 3:6-5:1). What can I say? That’s exactly what you would expect! Everyone was super gorgeous (Isaiah 61:10; Jeremiah 2:32), happy (Song of Solo-

mon 3:11), encircled by a joyful crowd (Revelation 19:7). Music and dancing were everywhere (Jeremiah 7:34), as well as the exchanging of gifts (1 Kings 9:16).

Psalms 45, a love song of the sons of Korah, describes one such moment. After praising the bride and groom, it excitedly proclaims (v. 17):

*“I will cause your name to be remembered  
in all generations; therefore nations will  
praise you forever and ever.”*

A wedding was not a meaningless topic that could be forgotten. It was a symbol of so much more. It was a public display, the commitment before others, that the bride and groom would make Adam and Eve’s desire their own—they would be one, live as one, dream together, and build together. They had no fear of commitment because they had the best “coach”, “therapist” or however you want to call Him—God. That is the key factor that helps us overcome our fears, crisis, and disappointments and allows us to renew the bond of love. No wedding planner is like Him. No marriage therapist is like Him. There is no one like Him. He invented marriage and He did it for us. It must be for a reason, right? Think about it.



## Don't Miss the Party

When I remember that Jesus began His earthly ministry at a wedding, I smile. Since it's Jesus we are talking about, I restrain myself, but... how smart of Him! He starts by having fun, enjoying the happiness of some newlyweds. I imagine him scheduling his activities for the next three years. In my mind, He says, "First, a wedding. We need to have a good beginning, like in Eden. That will be my way of affirming that the love of my Father is still alive between couples." You see, Jesus liked to include His Father (another ABBA, but much more melodic than the Swedish band) in everything, especially in decisions as important as choosing your significant other. As Sophie would say, "I want the perfect wedding and I want my **Father** to give me away."

By the way, in the time of Jesus, getting married was not so popular. Lots of people simply lived together until they had children, which is when they decided to get married to ensure some stability. It turns out we may not be as "modern" as we think.

The greatest celebration in a marriage does not take place on the wedding day, even if it lasts a whole week. It takes place every morning when you discover yourself next to a person

who really loves you, in a relationship that is long-lasting. It's not about how you use your toothpaste. It's not about going out on a date or having sex often. It's about two people who embrace God and grow together in character and maturity. It's about two people expressing generosity, acknowledging the differences and showing respect. It's about overcoming passions and embracing love. It's so romantic it feels movie-like, but it's actually true.



*"The greatest celebration in a marriage does not take place on the wedding day, even if it lasts a whole week."*

# QUESTIONS



- 1. What stood out for you from today's reading? Why?**

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- 2. Why would God "invent marriage for us"? What is the biblical concept of marriage? Revisit Genesis 2:24 and Ephesians 5:31-32.**

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- 3. Is getting married one of your dreams? Why or why not? If it is, what would happen if that dream were not to come true?**

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- 4. Does it make you uncomfortable to think of marriage as a "profitable contract"? How does this perspective affect your approach to marriage?**

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- 5. What are the differences between commitment in a marriage relationship and commitment in a dating relationship?**

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## GO DEEPER

- › **Read** Song of Solomon 3:6-11 and Psalm 45. How is the king described in these passages? What characterizes him?
- › **Read** Matthew 6:33. We may feel attracted to the power, status or wealth of a person. However, what should our priority be according to the Bible? What kind of kingdom is the kingdom of God? How can you apply Matthew 6:33 in the context of our conversation about marriage?
- › **Reflect:** “If you will seek first God’s kingdom and His righteousness and let that agenda drive your decision regarding whom you choose to marry and refuse to compromise on that, you will set yourself up for a much more fulfilling, spiritually enriching, and overall more satisfying marriage. *The degree to which you compromise on this verse is the degree to which you put your future satisfaction in jeopardy and open wide the door to great frustration and even regret.*”<sup>3</sup>
- › **Pray:** Talk to God about your priorities and your desires. Invite Him to be a part of your plans as you start every day. Ask Him to help you live by the ideal of Matthew 6:33.



## PERSONAL CHALLENGE

*“The greatest celebration in a marriage does not take place on the wedding day... It takes place every morning when you discover yourself next to a person who really loves you.”*

The relationship and bond that is nurtured in the context of a marriage is unique. It is so special it even points to our relationship with God (more on that in chapter 8). For this to be a reality, there is one element that can’t go missing: Jesus. We need His presence every single moment.

With Jesus, you discover yourself, *every morning, next to a person who really loves you*. If we put Him first in our lives, everything will be better (Matthew 6:33).

We encourage you today to get to know Jesus more intimately. Whether you are married or not, Jesus will change your life for the better. Our proposal is for you to read the best biography ever written about Jesus: *The Desire of Ages*, by Ellen G. White. **One chapter a day to change your life.** Pray to God that He helps you be consistent in this challenge. Share your favorite phrase of the day in your social media and with your friends.





# ACTIVITIES



## ACTIVITY 1: ROMAN LAW CASE

### Activity Description

In classical Roman Law, *iustae nuptiae* (marriage law) was already regulated, similarly to the way we regulate it nowadays. For the ancient Romans, it was fundamental that the parties (bride and groom) fulfilled the requirements of: 1) **age** and 2) **capacity** that were necessary to officiate a valid marriage, and for them to express their 3) **consent** (in other words, there should be no error, simulation or condition).

Read the following hypothetical cases and make your judgment as a group (like a Roman judge) regarding the validity of these marriages:

1. *Ticia* marries *Gayo*, but he attends the wedding as a somnambulist.
2. *Cayo* wants to marry *Sempronia*, but she is not an adult (12 years in Roman Law).
3. *Fulvia* got married to *Cefus*, but it was *Tito*, his twin brother, who attended the wedding in his place.
4. *Aurelia* has agreed to marry *Sexto*, on the condition that he will gift her with a Villa in Hispania.

### Application

Reflect on the ways the validity of marriages nowadays could also be questionable.

God's original plan for marriage was that it be celebrated in a pure and organized way. When we follow God's advice for us, our lives get closer to the ideal of happiness He designed for us.

Spend some time in prayer. Thank God for the peace He gives us when we follow His advice.

## ACTIVITY 2: THE DESERTED ISLAND... AND LOVE

### Activity Description

A well-known game to figure out a person's priorities consists in numbering different elements from 1 to 7, in order of importance, as you imagine the hypothetical case that you are stranded on a deserted island. Let's play!

- A comb
- A flashlight
- A radio
- A box of matches
- Insecticide
- A journal
- An mp3 player

Let's do the same exercise again, this time ordering the priorities you think a couple should have in their marriage. Discuss your answers with the group.

- Patience
- Humor
- Respect
- Trust
- Affection
- Responsibility
- Commitment

### Application

All of the elements above are positive for a marriage. It is very important to know our strengths as well as the things we need to improve in order to live our relationships in a healthy and mature way.

Spend some time reflecting on God's unconditional love for you and about how you can reflect it on others.



# THE **BEST** PROJECT

KEY TEXT:

SONG OF SOLOMON 4:1-7:9  
AND 1 CORINTHIANS 13



**Love! Love! Love! Love!**

*Love is a Bohemian child,*

*It has never, ever known a law.*

**If you don't love me, I will love you.**

*If I love you, you'd best beware!*

*If you don't love me,*

**if you don't love me, I will love you.**

*But if I love you,*

*if I love you, you'd best beware.*

**C**armen, a gypsy from Seville, sings these lyrics in Georges Bizet's most famous opera. Bizet actually died (of a heart attack when he was very young) without knowing how famous his work would become (even Paco Rabanne has used it to advertise his perfume "Pure XS!"). He introduced a new musical style: verism. What's that again? Verism, a way of seeing life as it is, in a "realistic," even pessimistic way, where everything is described without veils.

*Carmen* presents a love that is bohemian, uncontrolled, passionate. This love leads to tragic and unbalanced behavior. We could call it a short-term or "short-lived" love. Giovanni Verga, one of the major exponents of this movement, defined the ideals of those people who live defeated lives as the "oyster ideal." Yes, of the oyster. And he is onto something because he points to people who, like an oyster:

- › Shut themselves off from the outside world. They only take what they're interested in and that's it.
- › Don't throw out what is wrong on the inside; instead, they hang on to it. It may seem beautiful, like a pearl, but it is still a strange body in their lives.
- › Value sexual content way too much (oysters are the aphrodisiac *par excellence*).
- › Don't take a minute to think about what they are doing (remember the brain of an oyster is smaller than its eyes).

"Oyster" love can be very verist, but it does not reflect true love. As Solomon once put it, "But all this I laid to heart, examining it all, how the righteous and the wise and their deeds are in the hand of God. Whether it is love or hate, man does not know;

I AM MY  
BELOVED'S  
AND MY  
BELOVED  
IS MINE.

SONG OF SOLOMON 6:3



"THE TRUE REALITY OF LOVE IS LIVED OUT BY PEOPLE WHO FUNCTION **SIMILARLY TO A SPONGE.**"

both are before him" (Ecclesiastes 9:1). We need some guidance in this love situation. And since we are talking about sea creatures, I will use the sea sponge as an example. The true reality of love is lived out by people who function similarly to a sponge:

- › They are **open** to the outside world. They do filter, however, what is good for them and what is not.
- › They know how to **adapt** love to their circumstances. Their love is dynamic and contextualized.
- › They have a **healthy cleaning function**. They know how to solve life's problems and they don't hold onto grudges.
- › They **do their part** to make sure their relationships are balanced and permanent (sponges can live hundreds of years).
- › They are **survivors**. "Sponge" love is resilient, it does not give up when things turn south.

We could say that love is long-term or "long-lived." And the *Song of Solomon* is one of the books in the Bible that recommend such a love, an enduring project. See for yourself:

- › The love Solomon and the Shulamite have for each other is neither restrictive, nor possessive, nor childish. Their bond of love is so real that they can continue to be in contact with the world and display generosity.
- › They both manifest an interest for what makes the other unique. Do you remember how the Shulamite spoke about her dark skin because of her work in the fields and yet she turned it into something positive? We are not talking about a platonic or unreal love, nor a vengeful love that focuses only on the negative. Mutual understanding and creativity are a key ingredient in their relationship.

Problems appear (jealousy, doubts, insecurities) and problems are solved. The relationship is kept "clean" by exercising honesty and assertiveness. When in the shadows, move to the light. When before obstacles, overcome together.

This is why the love of the Bible is advertised using other melodies that go beyond what is purely sensual ("Pure XXL", by J.C. Rabbi).

## JESUS VERSUS SPONGE BOB

Someone is probably thinking, "But there are so many relationships between Christians that don't work." And you have a point; statistics back that up (oh, verism, verism, verism). We cannot be so simplistic as to think, "As long as I marry a guy/girl from my religion," everything will be fine. That would be like going for a cartoon relationship, a Sponge Bob love. As long as we live in a fallen world, love will not be exempt of complicating factors. The secret is not in a magic formula, but in healthy relationships in the company of God.

Jesus invested a good part of His message on that: on letting us know that love is not theoretical, it is to be lived; it is not about preaching, but about living. First and foremost, with God. Then, with everyone else (Mark 12:28-34). And within that group of "the others," we find people we don't like, people we don't understand, people we are not used to. Loving like Jesus enables us to love our enemies et al (adversary, opponent, annoying neighbor, brother-in-law, etc.), in an inclusive way. To love without discriminating, beyond our own (mental and social) comfort in order to be more open to others. To love without fear. To free ourselves and others from guilt. To make second chances the most common way to act. Lastly, to love with commitment, with the type of love that looks for the lost and does not fear surrender. Jesus loved like this. He sacrificed Himself for you before you even loved Him. His love is like that—He loves others as if they already loved Him (even though that is not usually the case).

## A LIFE-LONG—EVEN ETERNAL—PROJECT

The love of Jesus is explained by Paul—having us in mind—in 1 Corinthians 13. Paul refers to love using eight synonyms and eight antonyms. Since we are positive, let's focus on the synonyms:

- › **Patience.** The word in the original has a beauty of proverbial significance. It describes the emotional calmness of the person who loves when they find themselves in toxic and harmful environments. Love wants its loved ones to improve, so it patiently awaits. It does not wait because it is incapable or negligent, it waits because time is its ally.
- › **Kindness.** This is the active facet of patience. Love not only awaits, but it also acts. It is calm, meek and sensitive. I am sure that, when Paul wrote this word, he was thinking of Jesus. Love is kind because the universe was designed in harmony, beauty and infinite blessing.



**"HE SACRIFICED HIMSELF FOR YOU BEFORE YOU EVEN LOVED HIM.**

HIS LOVE IS LIKE THAT—HE LOVES OTHERS AS IF THEY ALREADY LOVED HIM (EVEN THOUGH THAT IS NOT USUALLY THE CASE)."

- › **Truth.** Truth is not merely a collection of correct theories. Rejoicing with the truth reveals an attitude; that is why it is so important. It shows that the person has chosen the path of understanding instead of doubting, of improvement instead of apathy, of seeking certainty instead of confusion.
- › **Bears all.** Paul uses a very graphic expression here. It comes from a root that means “to put a roof of straw.” Sometimes, in hostile situations, when it rains it pours. Love solves this by providing cover from the situation; it does not excuse, but it forgives the wrongdoings or omissions of the other. It sees in the other the potential to improve, and thus knows when it is best to keep quiet.
- › **Believes.** Paul is telling us, at the top of his lungs, to not be mistrustful. We should not go through life thinking someone will hurt us or disappoint us. Let’s trust one another as a principle. That attitude is a gift from God.
- › **Hopes.** Paul insists on hoping for the positive. As Christians, we know salvation is our horizon. We know the best is yet to come. We know that tribulation is fleeting.
- › **Endures.** Love endures all things when taken care of and committed to for the long haul. Some submit themselves because they have not understood love correctly or because they don’t understand that being humiliated is unhealthy. The word Paul uses goes beyond that. He endures all things because he does not cease to be a loving creature, he does not abandon his essence, he does not surrender to the attacks of adversity.
- › **Eternal.** Love “does not grow weaker;” it can never be extinguished. What a relief! That is the best news ever. Love knows of no bargains, it does not lose its value, it is always on the rise. Love is the best investment in history because it will never cease to give you profits for it is a constant value. A project for a lifetime.



"IF YOU DON'T LOVE ME,  
I WILL LOVE YOU.  
**AND IF I LOVE YOU,  
YOU WILL LOVE."**

By the way, the love that Jesus gives us, which is light years away from any negative verism, could be summarized in the verses that follow:

**Love! Love! Love! Love!**  
*Love is an honest child,  
who always, always says the truth.*  
**If you don't love me, I will love you.**  
*And if I love you, you will love.*  
*If you don't love me,  
if you don't love me, I will love you.*  
*If I love you,  
if I love you, you will love.*

**PRAYER OF THE DAY**

Dear God, I want my love to be more like a sea sponge, and less like an oyster. I want my life to be perfumed by the essence of the love of Jesus. Make 1 Corinthians 13 a reality in me.

# QUESTIONS



- 1. What stood out for you from today's reading? Why?**

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- 2. What are the signs of real love? What decision/s or change/s do you need to make to truly love?**

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- 3. In the light of what you learned today, how would you approach your relationships in general? And a dating or marriage relationship?**

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- 4. Should you marry only because you're "in love"? What could be a problem of this approach? How can you find a good spouse?**

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- 5. Read the following phrases and discuss with the group:**

**"A good marriage isn't something you find, it's something you make."<sup>1</sup>**

**"Making a wise marital choice begins with giving proper weight to more significant issues—a shared mission and character traits that will bless you or plague you for the next five or six decades—rather than sexual chemistry or romantic intensity that will fade within months."<sup>2</sup>**

**"God—not your marital status—defines your life."<sup>3</sup>**

**"The wrong why will lead you to the wrong who."<sup>4</sup>**

**"Marriage doesn't solve emptiness; it exposes it, so marry someone who has a solid core."<sup>5</sup>**

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## GO DEEPER

- › **Read** Song of Solomon 4:1-5:1. What is being described here? (Hint: look for the word Solomon repeatedly uses to refer to his beloved.)
- › **Research** where Song of Solomon 4:16-5:1 falls in the structure of the whole book. What does this tell you about its importance?
  - These verses draw your attention because they are situated in the structural center of the book.
  - According to Richard M. Davidson, the voice at the end of Song of Solomon 5:1 could be the voice of God Himself, saying a blessing over the marriage, just as He did in the garden of Eden.<sup>6</sup>
- › **Read** the phrases from question 5 again. In a notebook or your phone's notes app, write down your reaction to each one of them. How do they apply to your reality?
- › **Reflect:** "Marriage isn't just about finding the right person so that you can have a good marriage. It's also about becoming a better person, and anybody you marry can help you do that." (*The Sacred Search*, p. 219)
- › **Reflect:** Have you ever thought about how we sometimes spend more time doing research on the latest phone or a new accessory than on how to choose our future spouse wisely? Don't let yourself be influenced by superficial emotions of the "oyster" type. Be intentional with your search. For example:
  - **Watch** this series on Love and Marriage from Storyline Church (pastored by Ty Gibson): <http://bit.ly/loveandmarriageStoryline>
  - **Read** a book (on your own or with your partner/spouse) about how to make a wise decision in love, for example, *The Sacred Search*, by Gary Thomas.
- › **Pray:** Choosing who you date, and in turn, who you marry, requires wisdom. Include God in your search. Ask Him for direction and wisdom to make the right decision.



## PERSONAL CHALLENGE

Today's topic challenges us to analyze the quality of our love. Today's challenge for you has two parts:

1. Think about what you can do to be a better friend/boyfriend/girlfriend/spouse. Be specific. It's not just about finding a good friend/boyfriend/girlfriend/spouse, but about being one yourself as well. What concrete things do you need to change? Write them down and work on them until you grow in each aspect, by the grace of God. You may need to reach out for help to accomplish your goals.
2. Think about your expectations. Do you have a boyfriend/girlfriend? Would you like to have one? With what purpose? To have a good time? To get married (in time)? Do you want to cultivate a relationship in which God is at the center? Now think about what characteristics you need to look for in the other person to be coherent with your expectations (for example, I want to find someone who is humble and forgiving, someone who resolves conflict in a healthy way, someone who knows how to communicate, someone who prays...) It may be very useful to read a book on dating, marriage, etc. Take advantage of the wisdom so many people have already shared with the world!



# ACTIVITIES



## ACTIVITY 1: IF MARRIAGE WERE...

### Activity Description:

- › If your marriage were a city, which one would it be? It doesn't matter if you are not married: think about what its characteristics would be. Explain and share your ideas with the group.
- › If it were an animal, a song, or food... what would it be and why?

## ACTIVITY 2: THE BOND NEEDS TO BE TAKEN CARE OF, NOT WORN DOWN

**Materials:** tape.

### Activity Description:

- › Ask for two volunteers to join their two index fingers. Stick them together with tape. Now remove the tape and stick it again after swapping one of the people (i.e., with another volunteer).
- › Does the tape still work?
- › Repeat this action of sticking and removing the tape with different volunteers.
- › Does it keep working according to its purpose or has it lost its sticking ability?

### Application

What applications for relationships can you draw from this exercise?

Spend some time in prayer, talking to God about the quality of your relationships and how you would like Him to be present in each of them.

## ACTIVITY 3: COMMUNICATION IS ESSENTIAL

### Activity Description:

- › If there is a couple in the group, ask them to stand up and place them at opposite ends of the room, with a separation of 5 meters between them.
- › Ask the rest of the people to place themselves between them, and ask them to talk loudly. In the meantime, ask one of the members of the couple to try and say a phrase to the other.

### Application

Was that easy? How important is communication? It is essential to create space for intimate encounters, away from the noise of the environment and the interruptions.

## ACTIVITY 4: INTERVIEW LONG-LASTING MARRIAGES

**Materials:** pen and paper

### Activity Description

- › Write down a list of the most long-lasting marriages in your church.
- › Pick two of those marriages and ask them to grant you an interview.
- › Ask them about their experience, listen to their advice and take notes!
- › End your time with them in prayer. Ask them to pray for you and your project of love.



**WORD**  
**WORDS**  
**AND**  
**EVEN**  
**MORE**  
**WORDS**

KEY TEXT:

SONG OF SOLOMON 7:10-8:14



“SOME PEOPLE SHY AWAY FROM EXPRESSING THEIR EMOTIONS; THEY MAKE A MISTAKE. I LOVE TO TELL MY BELOVED WHAT I LIKE ABOUT HER.”  
(SELOMOH BEN-DAVID)

**YOU ARE SO BEAUTIFUL, MY BELOVED. YOU ARE A CHARMING WOMAN.**

SONG OF SOLOMON 8:6

**P**ress conference taking place in the King David Hotel in Jerusalem. Selomoh and Shulamit are the interviewees, recipients of the “Best Couple Award” of the last 3,000 years.

**MODERATOR:** Good morning! Thank you so much for joining us today and precisely on time. We now have the opportunity of spending a few minutes with the recently awarded “Best Couple.” We are speaking of none other than Selomoh and Shulamit. Welcome to this press conference at the King David Hotel in Jerusalem! For starters, how does this achievement make you feel?

**SELOMOH:** Would you like to begin?

**SHULAMIT:** Sure. The truth is I am surprised. There were so many nominees, I figured we would not be the lucky ones. So, yes, I am thrilled with the results, of course!

**SELOMOH:** I look at my wife and I’m reminded of a saying, “A gracious woman gets honor” (Proverbs 11:16). The merit isn’t mine; it’s hers. I feel happy because she is happy.

**SHULAMIT:** Well, you know how much Selo loves collecting sayings. He is always taking notes of people’s sayings when we travel.

**MODERATOR:** Shulamit, you just referred to Selomoh’s passion for sayings. He is also a very successful writer. How has the *Song of Solomon* impacted your relationship?

**SHULAMIT:** I like to think it was all about teamwork. We believed our story was appealing; it was worth telling. We started working with the scribe of the court, but, what can I say? It just felt artificial. In the end, Selo managed to fit it in his schedule and wrote it all down in one seating. We reread it several times and, truth be told, thoroughly enjoyed it.

**MODERATOR:** Why? What made you enjoy it so much?



**SELOMOH:** On the one hand, it was a project we did as a couple; on the other, it helped us reminisce on our story. I think marriages should intentionally remember their story regularly. Shared experiences strengthen relationships. It was really good for us. Such an enjoyable experience.

**MODERATOR:** Well, I don’t want to take up all the time we have for this interview. We have many colleagues who want to ask questions. The floor is yours.

**JOURNALIST 1:** Karl Kamal, from *Der Spiegel*. You have mentioned sayings and an autobiographical book based on your relationship. What is your relationship with words? Other people’s words and your own.

# "WE TEND TO FORGET ABOUT THE TIMES IN WHICH WE WERE HAPPY."



**SHULAMIT:** In my case, I've had some occasional problems with comments about me on social media. You already know how hurtful sites such as *Mournerest* or *Laundergram* can be. I was really hurt when I was picked on because of the color of my skin and my social status. Selo was very helpful at the time. We talked about it several times until I realized those were the things I liked the most about myself. I respect other people, but I choose carefully what comments to actually pay attention to. If they will strengthen our relationship, I let them in. If they will affect us negatively, I choose to ignore them.

**SELOMOH:** I listen attentively and keep the good advice. For example, my mother gave me some notes about what makes a woman truly valuable. I included them in the last chapter of my book, *Proverbs*. Wise words. As I read them, there was no doubt, they reminded me of Shulamit. Talking is so good for us. One of the secrets to a successful marriage is fluid communication.

**JOURNALIST 2:** Bella Donna for *Grazia*. How is that communication exactly? Tell us more about what your conversations are like, what you say, how you say it. Another question... Selomoh mentioned his *mamma*, what's your relationship like with your family?

**SHULAMIT:** *La mamma is la mamma* [laughs]. All joking aside, family is the extended relationship of a couple. We find a framework of protection and guidance in them. We accept their suggestions, and later, we adapt them to our reality as a marriage. As a saying from Selo goes, "Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge."

**SELOMOH:** Going back to the details of how we communicate. First of all, real conversation. A real conversation is not just about talking and talking, it's also about listening.

**SHULAMIT:** I'm better at talking, and he's better at listening.

**SELOMOH:** Conversations should also be assertive. You need to say things, not keep them to yourself. Mind you, you need to say them well. Assertiveness, lots of assertiveness. Whenever she starts a phrase with "my brother" or "Selomoh ben David," I pay very close attention.

**SHULAMIT:** I usually call him Selo.

**SELOMOH:** In addition to assertiveness, let me think now... kind words. Some people have a hard time expressing their emotions; that is a mistake. I love telling my beloved what I like about her.

**SHULAMIT:** And I love it when he tells me. Before, Selo mentioned how important it is to talk about shared experiences. It is so important, absolutely. And I would go even further. We should especially focus on moments of happiness. We tend to forget about the times in which we were happy. Verbalizing that happiness will do so much good in any situation.

**JOURNALIST 3:** Mee Two for *Cosmopolitan*. Is this a moment of happiness? One more question. Don't you think many of the compliments you give your wife in the *Song of Solomon* are instances of sexist microaggressions?

**SELOMOH:** Everything was a happy moment until now [half a smile]. Apologies for the irony. I don't think you should label it that way since I do not consider her an object. I don't say what I say to her to other women. She is special to me. When I say "my dove," "shorn ewes," "tower of David," or "orchard of pomegranates" I see beyond her skin; I see the person I am completely in love with. Also, remember *Song of Solomon* has a chapter 4, but it also has a chapter 5. She does not come up short with her own responses.

**JOURNALIST 4:** Dis Sonance for *Marie Claire* and *Femme Actuelle*. Those are very nice words to say at the beginning of a relationship, but how do you keep the passion alive for so long? Don't words wear away?

**SHULAMIT:** Excuse me, what do you mean when you say passion?

**JOURNALIST 4:** Passion is madness, something irresistible.

**SHULAMIT:** Oh, that passion. If you are alive, there are always small crazy things you can do as a couple. For example, we recently went to Aqaba to scuba dive. It was spectacular. We ended the day with a romantic evening. Was that a moment of passion?

**SELOMOH:** It most certainly was.

**SHULAMIT:** If he says so... Yes, it was a moment of passion, of mature passion.

**JOURNALIST 4:** But that is not passion, that is simply love.

**SHULAMIT:** Then I prefer love, with sane adventure.

**SELOMOH:** Now, about words wearing away. If they wear away, then you give them a new meaning or you create new ones. Lately, I have been researching the use of some proper nouns [complicit gaze fixed on the Shulamite]. For example, if I consider something is very beautiful, sweet or intimate, I say, "What a *shulamitance!*" [sigh]

"I SEE  
BEYOND  
HER SKIN;  
I SEE THE  
PERSON  
I AM ...  
IN LOVE  
WITH."



**JOURNALIST 5:** Sing Spiel with *Scherzo*. Your relationship sounds so much like *Bastien and Bastienne* by Mozart. Would you agree?

**SELOMOH:** Is that the opera he wrote when he was 12? The one about love between shepherds? I think she will have a better answer, she's the melomaniac<sup>2</sup> at home. Please, don't tell my father, he has a hard time with my relationship with music.

**SHULAMIT:** Thank you for that question. Apparently, the opera is about the love between a shepherdess and a shepherd, but that's all. There is deceit and lying in it. That is no way to build a successful and loving relationship.

**JOURNALIST 6:** Ani Mé for *Choir Choir Comic*. Greetings to you and your families. If you had to compare yourselves with a character from a comic, which one would you choose?

**SHULAMIT:** I would create my own character. Besides, I live in the real life. I say this respectfully, virtual life is not my thing.

**SELOMOH:** I subscribe to what she says. What a *shulamitance!*

**JOURNALIST 7:** Ess Ential for *Vanitha*. What is the most transcendental thing you've said to each other?

**SHULAMIT:** I can give you a quick answer because it's crystal clear to me and because I was really moved by something Selo wrote towards the end of the *Song of Solomon*: "Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm, 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." It moves me even now, because that flame refers to God.

**SELOMOH:** That's the secret right there: to live your relationship as a couple with God. If you count on Him, there is no setback you cannot overcome.

**MODERATOR:** I just got a WhatsApp message from Past Afari from *Good Kosher Food*: "Lunch time!" [laughter]. It's getting late and we need to let this couple get on with their lives. Thank you so much for your questions. Selomoh, Shulamit, thank you for your words.

Transcribed by: Quae Scribo

#### PRAYER OF THE DAY

Dear God, I acknowledge that words have the power to give life. Touch my heart so that the words that come out of my mouth are kind, loving, affectionate, constructive, honest and pure.



**IF YOU  
COUNT  
ON HIM,  
THERE  
IS NO  
SETBACK  
YOU  
CANNOT  
OVER-  
COME."**

# QUESTIONS



- 1. What stood out for you from today's reading? Why?**

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- 2. According to Victor, what are the necessary ingredients for good communication? Would you add anything else?**

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- 3. What would you now say is the secret to a successful marriage? (Consider past chapters too. What have you learned so far?)**

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- 4. What is the best advice you take with you today?**

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- 5. "I respect other people, but I choose carefully what comments to actually pay attention to. If they will strengthen our relationship, I let them in. If they will affect us negatively, I choose to ignore them." Who should we actually listen to and who should we not?**

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## GO DEEPER

- › **Read** Song of Solomon 4:1-7, 10-11; 5:10-16; 6:4-12; 7:1-9. Underline or highlight what stands out for you. What kind of words do both Solomon and the Shulamite use? With what purpose? Do you see any progression in the kind of “compliments” they give one another?
  - **Research** Song of Solomon 8:5-7. Use Bible commentaries, and ask your pastor or mentor.
  - These verses are located in the thematic center of the book, according to Francis Landy.
  - This is fascinating: If you look at the original Hebrew language, the word that occupies the “ultimate climactic position” is *šalhebetyâ*, which literally means “the flame of Yahweh,”<sup>2</sup> in other words, God’s name appears explicitly in the text, and is used to describe love (love is the flame of Yahweh).
  - All the book thus converges in Song of Solomon 8:6. According to Bible commentator André LaCocque, “the whole of the Canticle is **encapsulated** in this phrase [flame of Yahweh].”
- › **Reflect:** “The romantic climax of the Songs occurs toward the end of the poem, just before the epilogue. This is instructive, for it is after the couple has experienced the insecurities, trials, and forgiveness of marriage that they are able to enter even more deeply into the romantic pleasures of marriage. [...] The Song of Solomon, [...] would have us know that romance is best cultivated over a lifetime of commitment.”<sup>3</sup>
- › **Reflect:** “If human love is the very Flame of Yahweh, then this human love **at its best**—as described in the Song—, **points beyond itself to the Lord of love.**”<sup>4</sup>
- › **Read** Song of Solomon 8:6 again, bearing in mind that the original Hebrew language talks about the “flame of Yahweh.” What are the implications of the fact that love is described as the very flame of God?
- › **Pray** for the quality of your love, towards God and towards others.



## PERSONAL CHALLENGE

Today’s challenge consists in writing words of appreciation to 5-10 people in your life (a friend, a family member, a colleague, your significant other...).

Don’t stop there. Think about the kinds of words you use with other people. Is there anything you should change? Ask the Holy Spirit to convict you of those things you need to change and make a plan to accomplish it.

Finish with Song of Solomon 8:6, Proverbs 15:1 or Philipians 4:8. Write it down, draw it, use it for lettering, a song, or simply highlight it on your Bible... you can then take a picture and share it on your social media.



# ACTIVITIES



## ACTIVITY 1: POSTURING OF THE GOOD KIND

**Materials:** A mobile phone, a social media app (Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, etc.) and Wi-Fi.

### Activity Description:

Think about that special person, whether it is your significant other or a very close friend. Look for 4 pictures of an amazing time you spent together, loving memories you lived with that person, and share them on your Instagram or other social media, along with some positive messages about that person. You can focus on their qualities, on saying thank you, etc.

### Application:

As we have seen throughout the story in this chapter, it is really important to say the nice things that we notice in our relationships, whether they are friendships or love relationships. We often presume the other person already knows what we think about them because, after all, they are our favorite person! However, it is important and necessary to verbalize this every once in a while. One of the five love languages<sup>5</sup> is communication through words of affirmation. This is when the other person hears and receives your compliments in a way that makes them realize how much you love them. The Bible is full of great moments in which words had the power to change the lives of the protagonists. Highlight and focus on the strengths of your relationship and, as a result, you will get closer to the “perfect couple” God wants you to be.

## ACTIVITY 2: THE BEST COUPLE

**Materials:** A pen and a sheet of paper per person.

### Activity Description:

Think about the qualities or characteristics that should exist in your love relationship or in your friendship. Make a list.

What aspects exist already in your relationship and which ones do you need to work on as a couple? How could you implement them?

### Application:

A couple, whether a friendship or a love relationship, must be a team in which both win or lose together. If the couple sees itself as a team, they will always look for what is beneficial for both of them, they will always make sure their teammate is well, so that they are both well. Today’s text gives a lot of advice on the “perfect couple.” Each and every one is important for you and your relationships. The Bible gives us many examples to learn from. When we “translate” it into our current language, we can truly get the most out of them. Think about a couple as a team of two people who play together to reach the same goal; when we think only of our own well-being, we can hurt the team. Reflect on the qualities you wrote down and find a way to develop them. That will certainly help you be “the best couple.”



8

THE  
**BEST**  
OF THE  
**BEST**



KEY TEXT:

SONG OF SOLOMON 1:1  
AND REVELATION 19:1-8

# LET US REJOICE AND PRAISE HIM BECAUSE THE WEDDING DAY OF THE LAMB HAS ARRIVED. THE BRIDE—THE CHURCH— IS READY.

REVELATION 19:7

**R**abbi Akiva said, “For in all the world there is nothing equal to the day on which the Song of Songs was given to Israel, for all the writings are Holy, but the Song of Songs is the Holy of Holies” (Mishna, *Yadayim* III, 5). And in the *Song of Songs Rabbah*, rabbi Eleazar ben Azariah added, “Just so are all the Scriptures Holy, but the Song of Songs is the Holy of Holies. For all of it is Awe of Heaven and welcome of His Yoke.”<sup>1</sup>

They both believed there was something more to this romantic story. They compared it with the relationship of God with His people. And they were spot on. Ellen G. White addresses this as follows,

In both the Old and the New Testament the marriage relation is employed to represent the tender and sacred union that exists between Christ and His people, the redeemed ones whom He has purchased at the cost of Calvary. “Fear not”, He says; “thy Maker is thine husband; the Lord of hosts is His name, and thy Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel.” “Turn, O backsliding children, saith the Lord; for I am married unto you.” Isaiah 54:4, 5; Jeremiah 3:14. In the “Song of Songs” we hear the bride’s voice saying, “My Beloved is mine, and I am His.” And He who is to her “the chiefest among ten thousand,” speaks to His chosen one. “Thou art all fair, My love; there is no spot in thee.” Song of Solomon 2:16; 5:10; 4:7. (Ellen G. White, *Letters to Young Lovers*, p. 16)

The intimacy and complicity of a couple’s relationship is very similar to God’s relationship with His people. If you have a close look at the *Song of Solomon*, you will discover that, together with the Lord:

- › **We share a name and an identity.** He is Christ, we are Christians.
- › **We share Eden.** Jesus surrendered in the Garden of Olives so that we could enjoy the tree of life.
- › **We share the same condition.** With Jesus in our lives, our background and status don’t matter. Rather, it is about the possibility to love and be loved at the same level.
- › **We share in opportunity.** Christ sees the best in us, He goes beyond superficial aspects. We are all valuable and we all feel valuable. That feeling allows us to see other people’s value.



**IN THIS  
JOURNEY BACK TO  
THE INNOCENCE  
OF EDEN, IT IS  
BETTER TO TRAVEL  
AS A COUPLE. AS A  
COUPLE WITH  
A LOVED ONE AND  
AS A COUPLE  
WITH GOD.”**

- › **We share inner beauty.** Thanks to Jesus, we enjoy laughter, kindness, humor, gratitude, generosity, service, authenticity, coherence and transcendence. Even the best Van Gogh is lacking these many colors and textures.
- › **We share in our surrender.** We learn to give our all by His side, in the best sense and in all dimensions of kindness.
- › **We share in purity.** With Jesus in our hearts, things become more *our* own; we see things clearer, cleaner, brighter, and more elegantly.
- › **We share in celebrations.** We overcome our fear of commitment and move on to enjoying being responsible. And, as if that were not enough, we end up having a blast.
- › **We share a project.** With Jesus, the temporary becomes eternal. Our horizon expands further than we had ever imagined. And, when we least expect it, we look at ourselves and find that we are patient, kind, honest, understanding, trusting, hopeful, resilient, and even immortal (this last one will happen at the end of the end, at the beginning of the new beginning).
- › **We share in conversation.** Jesus loves to talk with us at home, when we open the door, invite Him in, and have dinner together. Those talks teach us about the sense of words that heal and the healthy Word.

So yes, it looks like there is more to the love story between King Solomon and the Shulamite. This book is present in many other love stories that start here and end there.

**FROM EDEN TO THE NEW EARTH,  
MAKING A STOP IN THE SONG OF  
SOLOMON**

- › In Genesis 2, God goes on a walk with Adam and Eve. He is an accessible God who loves to speak One on one. In Song of Solomon 5:2, the lover knocks at the door of his beloved, yearning to be together; a new example of the desire to remain close. In Revelation 3:20, Jesus knocks on the door of those He loves with the desire to have dinner with them—another example of His desire to get close.
- › In Genesis 2, Adam and Eve enjoy paradise. Nature, with its plethora of details, talks to them about a loving God who has decorated everything to the last detail. In Song of Solomon, the field and its animals are mentioned continually. It is a return to Eden. In Revelation 21, the New Jerusalem is a garden-city;

a space of unsurpassable beauty, which God Himself inhabits with His loved ones.

- › In Genesis 2, God marries Adam and Eve. Marriage is the natural and desired relationship for people. A relationship of duality and complementarity. Song of Solomon 3:6-5:1 places the wedding ceremony at the center of the book. Everything is filled with color and beauty to accompany the most sublime moment of a couple that has overcome every social and emotional obstacle. Revelation 19:1-8 focuses on the wedding of the Lamb and the whole universe cheers in exultation.

These are just a few examples that point us to a reality. In this journey back to the innocence of Eden, it is better to travel as a couple. As a couple with a loved one and as a couple with God.

## WE ARE ALL COMPOSERS, WE ARE ALL SINGERS

Revelation talks to us about a future celebration. Not any celebration, but **the** CELEBRATION. It will be a time for reencounters, hugs, banquets and music, lots of music. Revelation reminds us that the best opera is yet to come. I call it the *Song of the Song of Songs*, but it is officially known as the *Song of the Lamb* or the *Song of the Redeemed*.

We don't know much about its music genre nor the instruments that will be used, but, thanks to John, we do have part of the lyrics (SPOILER ALERT).

The first part goes as follows,

And they sang a new song, saying, "Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth." (Revelation 5:9-10)

A message of acknowledgement. Jesus loves us so much that He gave His all for us so we would have no problem in singing as many high Cs as necessary for the whole universe to know.

There are no lyrics here, but we do see what our attitude should be when we sing, because, in a way, we compose that opera with our very lives.

And I heard a voice from heaven like the roar of many waters and like the sound of loud thunder. The voice I heard was like the sound of harpists playing on their harps, and they were singing a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and before the elders. No one could learn that song except the 144,000 who had been redeemed from the earth. It is these who have not defiled themselves with women, for they are virgins. It is these who follow the Lamb wherever he goes. These have been redeemed from mankind as first fruits for God and the Lamb, and in their mouth no lie was found, for they are blameless. (Revelation 14:2-5)



**REVELATION  
REMINDS US  
THAT THE BEST  
OPERA IS YET  
TO COME.”**





**WE HAVE REACHED  
THE CLIMAX.  
EVERYONE FINDS  
OUT WHO GOD IS.  
A CREATOR AND  
SUSTAINER GOD.”**

Four attitudes. An attitude of **purity**, of moving away from whatever is confusing and dark. An attitude of **following Jesus**, our model, and living in accordance with His message. An attitude of **authenticity**, where there is no dissonance, only truth. And an attitude of **surrender**: I cannot be justified by my own terms, I need to put myself in the hands of the One who can cleanse my sins—Jesus.

Third spoiler, a segment of the score<sup>1</sup> of the *Aria of the Lamb*:

And they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, “Great and amazing are your deeds, O Lord God the Almighty! Just and true are your ways, O King of the nations! Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship you, for your righteous acts have been revealed.” (Revelation 15:3-4)

We have reached the climax. Everyone finds out who God is. A Creator and Sustainer God. A God who helps us grow in character and behavior. A Most Holy God. A God we worship as a response to His commitment to us and His faithful promises.

What can I say? We need to be at this premiere because it will be a **Magna Opera**. What’s more, we need to be a part of it, we need to sing with our whole being, full of joy and love. In that sense, I encourage you to start rehearsing already. Train your voice so that your words bring life. Take in a deep breath of the Spirit who perfects everything. Above all, learn to love the way God wants you to.

I call dibs<sup>3</sup> on singing next to Solomon and the Shulamite. And, I do hope to see you nearby.

**PRAYER  
OF THE DAY**

Dear God, I desire to learn to love the way You want me to love. Help me have an attitude of purity, of following Jesus, of authenticity and of surrender in love. Thank you for the hopeful future you gift us; help me live every day according to the principles of your eternal kingdom.

# QUESTIONS



1. **What stood out for you from today's reading? Why?**

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2. **"Learn to love the way God wants you to." What does that mean to you now?**

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3. **Why is the marriage relationship compared to the relationship of God with His people?**

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4. **Read Ephesians 5:21-32. See again how Paul quotes Genesis 2:24. Also focus on the importance of the last verse (32). Talk about how, in the light of this text, marriage is a "type" of the relationship of Jesus with the church. How does that make you feel about marriage? And about dating relationships in general?**

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5. **What has been the greatest lesson or takeaway for you in this study of Song of Solomon? What questions remain? Share with the group.**

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## GO DEEPER



- › **Look** again at the list Víctor shared of a series of qualities we share with Jesus, according to Song of Solomon.

  - In your notebook or in a digital file, draw a table with three columns, like the one below. Think about how you can apply each characteristic in your relationship with Jesus and in your relationship with your (future) partner. You can change the last column for your friend or a close family member.
  
- › **Research** the four words that are used for love in the original Greek of the Bible. What does each one of them mean? Ask your pastor or your mentor for help.

  - Did you know that the Greek translation of the Bible, the Septuagint, uses the Greek word *agape* to refer to love in Song of Solomon? *Agape* is the word that describes the selfless love of God in the New Testament. What does this make you think about the kind of love we have studied in the Song of Solomon? What ideal does it set for us?
  
- › **Reflect** on the climactic point of the song, Song of Solomon 8:6: “If the blaze of love—ardent love—such as between a man and woman, is indeed the Flame of Yahweh, then **this human love is explicitly described as originating in God**, ‘a spark off the Holy Flame.’ It is, therefore,

a **holy love**. Such a conclusion has profound significance for the whole reading of the Song of Songs—and for the **quality and motivation** of human sexual love. Song 8:6 makes explicit what was already implicit in the woman’s adjurations of her companions **not to awaken love until it is ready** (2:7; 3:5; 8:4). [...] **The love relationship is not only beautiful, wholesome, and good but holy.**”<sup>4</sup>

- › **Read** Genesis 1-3 and Revelation 21:1-7. Where do we come from? What awaits us in the future of God? What impacts you the most from these passages? How should our present be impacted by the past (beginning) and the future of the story of humankind?
- › **Research** other Bible passages that talk about God as a lover or husband. You can start with Isaiah 62:5, Ezekiel 16:8 and Hosea. What other verses did you find?
- › **Pray** for the next steps you will take after this study on the Song of Solomon. Ask God to help you choose a personal challenge that will truly help you grow and make good decisions in your relationship, especially your romantic relationships (present or future).

CHARACTERISTIC	How will I apply this in my life ...	
	... with Jesus	... with my (future) partner/spouse
We share a name and an identity.		
We share Eden.		
We share the same condition.		
We share in opportunity.		
We share inner beauty.		
We share in our surrender.		
We share in purity.		
We share in celebrations.		
We share a project.		
We share in conversation.		



## PERSONAL CHALLENGE

We have now reached the end of this study on Song of Solomon. Truth is, the topic of love, relationships and marriage continues to be as current today as any other time in history. We all long for fulfilling relationships. We want to love and be loved. To experience real love.

Don't walk away from this study without making it real and meaningful to you and your circumstances.

Be intentional about your approach to love, relationships and, yes, even marriage. Choosing a spouse is one of the most important decisions you will ever make. Surely it deserves that you take the time to research, learn from others, and, as a follower of Jesus, understand the purpose of God for love and marriage. After all, "People who marry well aren't lucky in love. They're intentional in their path."<sup>5</sup>

Below, you find several options to choose from, as a final challenge.

1. Take some time to review all the lessons. Use page 72 to write down your thoughts as a conclusion to this journey. What has impacted you the most? What are the next steps for **you**? Ask yourself the following questions:<sup>6</sup>
  - a. How has the Holy Spirit used your study of the Song of Solomon to enrich your understanding of the gospel?
  - b. In what aspects of your own character would you like to grow as a result of the study of Song of Solomon?
  - c. How have you grown in the understanding of God's love through the study of Song of Solomon?
2. Did you run out of time to complete any of the Personal Challenges or the Go Deeper sections? Now is a perfect time to go back and do it. You can even turn a personal challenge into a weekly, monthly or yearly goal.
3. We only had 8 chapters to go over Song of Solomon. This may not have been enough for you. You may still have questions. You may still need to go over it again. Use a Bible Study Guide such as *Knowing the Bible: Song of Solomon, A 12-Week Study*, by Jay Harvey to dig even deeper. Ask your pastor, a friend or a mentor to recommend a similar resource, if you prefer. The important thing is to use a study guide as a tool to help you get the most out of the text.
4. Talk to your pastor or mentor and use this study as a prompt to organize Bible study groups, Q&A sessions, talks, one-on-one conversations, etc. to keep on discovering more about God and love, relationships, sex, dating and singleness. Do not keep your questions and thoughts to yourself. There is growth in sharing with other people. You may also be interested in addressing topics that were not directly addressed in this study and that matter to you, such as divorce, pornography, masturbation, gender... Whatever you do, always keep in mind that God is love, and everything we plan, say or do must be motivated by that love.
5. Learn from the wisdom of others.
  - a. So many books have been written about love and relationships, which can be so helpful in your own relationships. Now is the perfect time to choose a book on love, sex or relationships and take the time to read it, either by yourself, with friends, with your significant other or with your spouse. Make sure you actively read it, highlighting what stands out for you and writing down your own comments and takeaways. Here are a few suggestions:
    - *The Sacred Search*, by Gary Thomas.
    - *The 5 Love Languages*, by Gary Chapman.

- *The Meaning of Marriage*, by Timothy Keller (with Kathy Keller).
- *Real Family Talk: Answers to Questions About Love, Marriage, and Sex*, by Willie & Elaine Oliver.
- *Commit or Quit*, by Harry Benson.
- *Swipe Up*, by Jason Roach.

As with anything you see or read, apply the principle of Paul: “Test all things; hold fast what is good” (1 Thess. 5:21). Make up your **own** mind about this important topic, asking for guidance from the Holy Spirit.

- b.** In addition to books, you can also listen to podcasts, sermons, etc. and check out resources on the topic. Here are a few of examples:
- Love & Marriage Series, Storyline Church (Nelita Crawford and Ty Gibson): <http://bit.ly/loveandmarriageStoryline>
  - Why Jesus Can’t Be Your Boyfriend (Darlye Innocent, Adventist Christian Fellowship): <http://bit.ly/whyjesusnoboysfriend>
  - Resources for couples: <https://family.adventist.org/people/couples/>

**6.** Reflect on and work through these questions that may pose a challenge for you: Is **commitment** an issue for you? Why? Are you ultimately afraid of things going wrong, as in “ending up in divorce”? Are you looking for a false safety in an “uncommitted relationship,” because, after all, most people just end up in divorce? Perhaps the statistics you “have heard” don’t exactly reflect the reality for those following God’s advice.

- a.** Check out this article on Christian Divorce rate: <http://bit.ly/Christiandivorce>, and get a different glimpse on reality. How does this research provide hope for you?

**b.** Did you know?

- “The prevalence of sadness, suicide ideation, suicide plans and suicide attempts increased with the number of sexual partners across all racial/ethnic groups.” (“The Relationship between Multiple Sexual Partners and Mental Health in Adolescent Females.” Retrieved from <http://bit.ly/EffectsMultipleSex>)
- “The happiness-maximizing number of sexual partners in the previous year is calculated to be 1.” (*Money, Sex and Happiness: An Empirical Study*. Retrieved from <http://bit.ly/Sexandhappiness>)

**c.** Now, have a look at your relationships. How can you be more **committed** in your relationships (friendship/dating/marriage)? What practical steps do you need to take? Make sure you make the first step in the next 72 hours.

**7.** What (hard) questions do you need to address for yourself regarding love? Do it now.

# ACTIVITIES



## ACTIVITY 1: WE ARE IN IT TOGETHER

**Materials:** Markers that can be used for lettering, special paper to make cards or postcards, stamps and stickers (optional). Card editing app (optional).

### Activity Description

This activity may be done individually, as a couple or in a group.

- › Use your creativity to design different cards or postcards with messages or slogans of the different things we share according to Víctor (see the first part of chapter 8). For example, “We share inner beauty,” “We share in opportunity.” You can do this with lettering or using your tablet or computer to make a nice design.
- › Use next week to share at least one card or postcard a day on your social media. You can also give it to someone as a gift. Take the time to explain how this is a way of sharing the authentic love God offers us.

### Application

Solomon shared wisdom from God on how we should love, to the point we can still learn from his artistry and profundity today. Sending profound, artistic messages, even if only brief ones, on our social media, can be a way of sharing God’s love with others, and inviting them not only to reflect on, but to experience it themselves.

## ACTIVITY 2: RECONSTRUCTING PARADISE, CULTIVATING THE RELATIONSHIP

**Materials:** Flat white or light-color small rocks, 1 transparent container, soil for plants, flower or aromatic-plant seeds, 2 decorative boxes made of cardboard or wood (for example, a small chest), permanent marker.

### Activity Description

This activity may be done individually, as a couple or in a group. You can make this activity last as long as you’d like.

### Preparation:

- › On the flat rocks, write words or short phrases that describe and remind you of situations, scenes, landscapes, personal relationships, the relationship with God, activities, praise, etc. in both paradises: the paradise of Eden and the future, restored paradise on the New Earth. Put the rocks about the garden of Eden in one box, and those about the New Earth in the other. Now choose a special place for the empty container and the two boxes.

### Activity:

- › During the time chosen to develop this activity, each participant will choose a rock from each box (2 rocks in total) and put them at the bottom of the jar. For example: choose the rocks early in the morning after you do your morning devotion or before you leave the house, or before you go to bed, or every time you get together with your significant other, or every time the youth group gets together, or every Friday at sunset, or on Sabbath, etc.
- › Once you have put in all the rocks you want, set a special time to put the soil in. Finally, plant the seeds and wait for them to sprout.

### Application

Cultivating a relationship is a way of reconstructing God’s original plan for Adam and Eve in the paradise of Eden. That is how life will be restored in the paradise of the New Earth. That reconstruction reminds us, here and now, of where we come from and where we are headed. Above all, it helps us grow in identity, in knowing who we are and in acknowledging we have been created by the Creator in love and for love. This can all be typified by the growth of a seed, which requires loving care and good soil in order to excel. In a similar way, relationships are rooted in the love of God, which we learn about in Eden and which we will experience fully in the New Earth.

### ACTIVITY 3: SINGULARS IN PLURAL

**Materials:** Cardboard, quick dry glue or hot glue, scissors, magazine or newspaper clippings, printed photographs, everyday items, markers or paint (optional). Photograph editing app (optional).

#### Activity Description

This activity may be done individually, in couples or in a group. The goal is to make a painting or a collage as an artistic representation of another person and oneself.

- › The idea for each painting is to capture the face and/or body of the person (someone else's and your own) using clippings and everyday objects. The condition is that each part of this collage must represent something that is characteristic of the person it describes. For example, if I am representing a person who loves botany, I will use flower petals or plant leaves for their head; if I think the person has a great musical gift, I will draw their smile with clippings of piano keys. Another example: If I love being on time, I can cut out clocks to make my eyes; if I love to give gifts, I will design my fingers with colored ribbon, etc. What makes this interesting is to not only focus on the physical aspects of each person, but also on their emotional and spiritual aspects.
- › Once you finish, it is time to reflect on both creations. The focus of this artistic dialogue is on explaining and comparing how we see ourselves and how the other person sees us, what joins us together, what makes us different, how we complement each other, what we like or are drawn to, what makes each of us special and unique. Finally, pray together, give thanks for each other and ask God to bless each of you.

#### Application

When we discover other people through the lens of the love God gifts us, we learn to acknowledge and value their singularity: what makes each and every one of us different, special

and unique. In the case of a couple, they may have these peculiarities in common or they may be different, thus complementing each other. To sum it all up, with God's help, this figurative art exercise can help us to discover what makes us plural, starting from the singular. We learn to focus on reciprocal, plural love: **"we love one another."**

### ACTIVITY 4: PRAYER

Let's end our time together in prayer, either in silent prayer, or in groups of 3 or 4 people. Pray for the following prayer motives:

- › **Better Than Anyone Else:** Ask God to help you recognize the loveliest song, to feel nostalgia for the world we were created for and for the relationships of love that began there.
- › **The Greatest Beauty:** Ask God to open our eyes so we can discover the beauty that lies in the vicinity of smarter eyes.
- › **The Best Love:** May we love the way God likes us to love, in all its dimensions, enjoying all, giving our all, at the right time and in the proper context.
- › **The Purest Kind:** Ask God to help us live high-quality relationships, characterized by the adjectives of a good lover.
- › **The Most Profitable Contract:** Ask God to help us overcome our fear of commitment and to help us establish deep and long-lasting relationships.
- › **The Best Project:** May our love be more like a sea sponge and less like an oyster, may it be a love of the 8 positive synonyms we read about in 1 Corinthians 13.
- › **The Best Words:** May God touch our lips so we always speak life-giving words of love.
- › **The Best of the Best:** May each of our relationships point to the New Earth, because we have learned to truly love, the way God wants us to love.

# MAGNA OPERA

## THE LOVELIEST SONG

*Original Title: Opera Magna: El cantar más bello*  
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*This resource is recommended to be used as the  
Youth Week of Prayer for 2021.*

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here: <https://bit.ly/MagnaOperaFeedback>



## FOOTNOTES

### WHAT IS THIS DOING IN THE BIBLE?

- <sup>1</sup> Suggestive language.
- <sup>2</sup> Pleasing.

### HOW TO MAKE THE MOST OF THIS STUDY GUIDE

- <sup>1</sup> Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 93. Retrieved from [egwwritings.org](http://egwwritings.org)

### CHAPTER / ONE

- <sup>1</sup> <http://bit.ly/oldestlovepoem>
- <sup>2</sup> That's what Aristophanes said, "Now, since their natural form [of human beings] had been cut in two [by the gods], each one longed for its own other half, and so they would throw their arms about each other, weaving themselves together..." *Symposium*, by Plato, p. 27. It seems the first created beings—according to Greek mythology—were double beings (two heads, four arms, four feet, etc.) who spent the whole day going around in circles and making noise. The Greek gods got tired of it and, boom! they divided them in half.
- <sup>3</sup> This is not a person, but rather a collection of Egyptian love manuscripts from the 13<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> centuries BC, which are found in the Chester Beatty Library in Dublin, Ireland. <http://bit.ly/ChesterBeattyLove>
- <sup>4</sup> Perfectly typical or representative of a particular kind of person or thing. Par excellence.
- <sup>5</sup> Putting in their two cents means to express their opinion.
- <sup>6</sup> <https://www.thewishfulbox.com/portfolio/into-the-wild-a-poem-for-nature/>

### CHAPTER / TWO

- <sup>1</sup> One of our author Víctor's many talents is his knowledge of the Hebrew original. The highlighted texts at the beginning of each chapter have been either translated or paraphrased from the original by Víctor himself, which is why you will notice they may differ slightly from your Bible translation.
- <sup>2</sup> <http://bit.ly/OperaJewelSong>
- <sup>3</sup> Pale skin.
- <sup>4</sup> Speedy is a specific model of Louis Vuitton bags.
- <sup>5</sup> Jen Wilkin (2018). *In His Image: 10 Ways God Calls Us to Reflect His Character*, Illinois, USA: Crossway, p. 153.

### CHAPTER / THREE

- <sup>1</sup> Chelonian is another word for turtle.
- <sup>2</sup> *Confronting Christianity*, p. 141.3.
- <sup>3</sup> *Idem*, p. 160.
- <sup>4</sup> NKJV: New King James Version; ESV: English Standard Version; NLT: New Living Translation; NIV: New International Version.
- <sup>5</sup> Source: "Is God Present in the Song of Songs?" by Richard M. Davidson. Available on: [academia.edu](http://academia.edu).

### CHAPTER / FOUR

- <sup>1</sup> Eve means evening.
- <sup>2</sup> A four-by-four is a vehicle that goes over any type of terrain.
- <sup>3</sup> A *piñata* is a decorated papier-mâché container filled with candy and gifts, which is hung up in parties and struck with a stick until it breaks open.

### CHAPTER / FIVE

- <sup>1</sup> <http://bit.ly/InterviewingKate>
- <sup>2</sup> Tongue is another word for language.
- <sup>3</sup> Gary Thomas (2013). *The Sacred Search*, Colorado, USA: David C Cook, p. 22.

### CHAPTER / SIX

- <sup>1</sup> Gary Thomas (2013). *The Sacred Search*, Colorado, USA: David C Cook, p. 144.
- <sup>2</sup> *Idem*, pp. 45-46
- <sup>3</sup> *Idem*, pp. 59-60.
- <sup>4</sup> *Idem*, p. 50.
- <sup>5</sup> *Idem*, p. 209.
- <sup>6</sup> Source: "Is God Present in the Song of Songs?" by Richard M. Davidson. Available on: [academia.edu](http://academia.edu).

### CHAPTER / SEVEN

- <sup>1</sup> A melomaniac is a lover of music.
- <sup>2</sup> We know this is the climactic position because of the literary devices used in the original Hebrew. Source: Richard M. Davidson (2007). *Flame of Yahweh: Sexuality in the Old Testament*, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, p. 624. It's worth your while to read chapters 13 "Sexuality in the Song of Songs: The Holy of Holies" and 14 "Sexuality in the Song of Songs: The Flame of Yahweh."
- <sup>3</sup> Jay Harvey (2018). *Knowing the Bible: Song of Solomon, A 12 Week Study*, Chapter 10 "Week 10: Renewed Consummation," par. 1. [Kindle version] Retrieved from Amazon.com.
- <sup>4</sup> Richard M. Davidson (2007). *Flame of Yahweh: Sexuality in the Old Testament*, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, pp. 630, 631.
- <sup>5</sup> See *The Five Love Languages*, by Gary Chapman.

### CHAPTER / EIGHT

- <sup>1</sup> <http://bit.ly/GodIsraelAsLovers>
- <sup>2</sup> The score is the music sheet.
- <sup>3</sup> I call dibs means I claim something for myself.
- <sup>4</sup> Richard M. Davidson (2007). *Flame of Yahweh: Sexuality in the Old Testament*, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, p. 630.
- <sup>5</sup> Steve Watters, as quoted in *The Sacred Search*, p. 80.
- <sup>6</sup> Taken from Jay Harvey (2018). *Knowing the Bible: Song of Solomon, A 12-Week Study*, Chapter 10 "Week 12: Summary and Conclusion." [Kindle version] Retrieved from Amazon.com



*Song of Solomon* becomes a delightful compilation of love songs when we make it our own, when we allow it to guide our lives and stories. It brings us closer to the Eastern melodies and embraces us with affection, dialogue, respect, and—even—good sex.

*In these eight chapters, you will enjoy a particularly exciting experience as well as the greatness of the Bible message, which has the power to touch us in the deepest part of our being.*

“Mildness, gentleness, forbearance, long-suffering, being not easily provoked, bearing all things, hoping all things, enduring all things—these are the fruit growing upon the precious tree of love, which is of heavenly growth. This tree, if nourished, will prove to be an evergreen. Its branches will not decay, its leaves will not wither. It is immortal, eternal, watered continually by the dews of heaven.” (Ellen G. White, *Testimony Treasures*, vol. 1, p. 209)



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