

# Echo of Love (Song of Solomon)

**Big Idea:** Praise God for the gift of passion that's an echo of an even greater love.

One of the most uncomfortable moments I've ever had is at a conference a few years ago in Florida. A married couple was leading music. The male music leader turned to the female music leader, his wife, and read a passage of Scripture.

She blushed. We all felt uncomfortable. What part of the Bible could make thousands of people cringe? The male music leader read from a particularly erotic section of the Old Testament book we call the Song of Songs or the Song of Solomon, and we all wanted to tell them: get a room! Some things are a little too intimate to share with a large crowd.

We don't know what to do with this book. If you've been around Liberty Grace Church, this is not the first time we've preached on this book of the Bible that's so often neglected by churches, and that has been interpreted very differently in different eras of church history. As one [Old Testament introduction](#) states:

*Perhaps no other biblical book has been read so differently from one time period to another. In the Middle Ages, very few would interpret the book in connection with human sexuality. Indeed, to do so was dangerous and could result in excommunication or worse ... Today, most Christians find such an approach natural and sensible. However, is it correct to interpret the Song in such a "non-*

*theological" manner? Why is a book that has such obviously erotic overtones in the canon?*

Those are two good questions. What is this book all about? And what in the world is it doing in the Bible?

## **What's It About?**

So here's what it's all about: it's Hebrew love poetry. No wonder the book is so foreign to us! Most of us aren't used to reading any kind of love poetry at all, never mind love poetry that's thousands of years old. Not only are we unfamiliar with this genre, but it's strange to see something like this in the Bible:

*Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth!*

*For your love is better than wine;*

*your anointing oils are fragrant...*

*Draw me after you; let us run.*

*The king has brought me into his chambers.*

*(Song of Songs 1:2-4)*

At first glance, it's not really hard to figure out what it's about. It's about a couple who've fallen madly in love with each other, and are full of desire for each other. The reason why this book makes us a little uncomfortable is that it is pretty easy to figure out what the author's talking about, and some of it makes us pretty uncomfortable because it's so erotic!

So you're going to be able to understand the overall theme of this Song. But let me give you a few hints that will help you as you read it, as I hope you do, that should help to make sense of the book.

- **Relax and don't worry too much about the plot.** Some of the approaches try to make sense of this book by finding a cohesive plot. But there are a few problems with this. There's no obvious plot structure. It's hard to even figure out how many characters are in the book. It's probably better to just read the book as a collection of loosely related love poems rather than to try and figure out a story that probably doesn't exist.
- **Keep the main theme in mind.** Again, it's better to begin with what we know and then move to what we don't know. It's really easy to get caught up in the details – for instance, what each part of the imagery means. But here's the main theme: a man and a woman love and desire each other. That much is clear. Everything else is details.
- **Be okay with the poetry being a little different.** We live thousands of years and thousands of kilometers away from the original context. We should expect that a poem we write today in Canada may seem a little strange to someone in the distant future in a different part of the world. So when the male in the Song of Songs says things like this to the woman – “Your neck is like the tower of David, built in rows of stone; on it hang a thousand shields, all of them shields of warriors” (4:4) – we should get the point that he's saying something like, “You've got a very dignified neck, and I love your necklace,” and be okay with not including it in your Valentine's Day card next year.

So what's it about? That's not hard to answer. It's a collection of erotic love poems that express love and desire between a man and a woman.

But that leaves a second question we need to answer?

## **Why Is It in the Bible?**

Let me give you three reasons:

### **First, because God is God of all of your life including your sex life.**

This is probably the greatest lesson we need to learn from the Song of Songs. We think that God is God over all of our lives, but we have this idea that maybe God is a little squeamish about sex. We understand, of course, that he knows it happens, but we think that he's not happy about it, and that he wishes it wouldn't happen.

The Song of Songs busts through that and communicates not only that God is comfortable with sex, but that he celebrates it because he made it, and that he is God over all of our lives, including the sexual parts.

That, my friends, is one reason it's in the Bible.

Here's Satan's design. Satan wants to take God's good gifts and weaponize them against us. Satan can't invent any good gifts. All he can do is distort them. So Satan has taken sex and weaponized it against us. He's convinced us that we have to enjoy sex on his terms because there's no way God could be okay with us getting any pleasure from something like sex.

C.S. Lewis described this in *The Screwtape Letters*, in which he imagines a senior devil writing to a junior one. The senior devil says:

*Pleasure is his invention, not ours. He made the pleasures; all our research so far has not enabled us to produce a one. All we can do is to encourage the humans to take the pleasures, which our Enemy has produced, at times, or in ways, or in degrees which He has forbidden.*

And God busts in through the Song of Songs and reveals that God made us as sexual beings. He gave us sexual desires. He designed us to enjoy God's good gift of sex. He's not at all squeamish about it. In fact, he celebrates this part of our humanity because he invented it.

God invented sex. God loves sex. God is not squeamish about sex. He gave it to us as a gift. Song of Songs teaches us to bring this part of our lives under his reign, and not to wall it off and think that God has nothing to do with it. God is God of all of your life, including your sex life.

## **Second: You have permission to enjoy this part of your life.**

Why does poetry exist? One of the reasons that poetry exists is because it expresses emotion in a way that other genres can't. So why does Song of Songs exist? Why is it even called the Song of Songs? Because sex and romance are packed with emotion.

We basically have two ways to view sex in our culture today.

- One is to make it an idol. An idol is basically something we value more than we value God himself. It's to take something and make it more important

than God, and to think that we can control it. This is one of the major things that people tend to do with sex: we idolize it. One way to know we're idolizing it is if we refuse to submit our sex lives to God. This is elevating our sex lives above God. This is always dangerous, because our idols will always let us down.

- Another way is to treat sex as taboo. It's to think that sex is dirty or off limits.

These are the two main ways that we tend to deal with sex, but Song of Songs gives us a third: to treat sex as a gift from God to be enjoyed under his rule.

There's a phrase that repeats itself throughout these poems. "I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, by the gazelles or the does of the field, that you not stir up or awaken love until it pleases" (2:7; 3:5; 8:4). This is an encouragement to wait until marriage to stir up the kind of passion expressed in this book. Don't stoke that fire before you're married, because once lit, that fire is hard to control.

But once you're married, the book teaches, go for it. This book takes a couple who desire each other, sends them on a honeymoon, and celebrates their passion. It teaches us that, within marriage, we should enjoy the sexual relationship with everything that we've got. I love how Ray Ortlund puts it: "The wisdom of God is saying, 'When you get married, drop your inhibitions, and go for it.'" Sex isn't meant to be either an idol or a taboo. Instead, it's meant to be enjoyed within the gift of marriage.

## **Finally: This gift points us to an even greater one.**

What I've just said excludes many of you. You may be unmarried, and you've just heard that God has given you a gift that you can't enjoy because you're not currently

married. The reality is that, even if you're married, there will come a time when you won't be able to enjoy God's gift of sexuality.

So what does this book have to say to those of us who don't get to enjoy sex?

Sam Allberry is single, and he's written a book called [7 Myths of Singleness](#), one that's really worth reading for all of us. Here's what's interesting. One of Allberry's favorite books is a book based on the Song of Songs called [Jesus, Lover of my Soul](#). I got curious about this book and got it. Here's the thesis of the book: that "that Jesus loves me with the passion of a man for a woman, and that the Song of Songs illustrates this in extraordinary colours, scents and tastes, a music of words to set our souls on fire in response."

It's not that the Song of Songs isn't love poetry between a man and a woman. It's that these love poems give us a window into a greater love: the love of Jesus for his people. Please don't lose sight of the message of this book: it's a celebration of romantic love. But we should also realize that every romantic relationship is an echo of the ultimate love relationship we were meant to enjoy, one in which we are known and loved by God.

The book *Jesus, Lover of My Soul* says: "For most of us, let's be honest, it feels strange to address Jesus as a romantic partner - a lover, fiancé, bridegroom, even a husband."

And yet, it says:

*The Song tells us that whether single or married, our experience of human relationships will never match that of the lovers in the Song, nor be enough to fully satisfy us. It makes us long for a more than merely human intimacy, and gives a dramatic framework for us to experience that intimacy with Christ. Its poetry stimulates our imaginations to see how Christ loves us.*

I don't know what you make of that. It can be hard to get our heads around. But it's certainly one of the main messages of the Bible: that, as Ray Ortlund [says](#), "Marriage is the wraparound concept for the entire Bible ... the Bible is telling a story of married romance." Or as he also says, "Married sex, with its intimacy and desire and pleasure and intensity and adoration and satisfaction and rest, is a glorious metaphor of heaven."

If you are in Christ, you are loved. You are desired. The greatest romance is just a faint echo of the endless love that Christ has for his people.

So praise God for the gift of passion. But praise God that it's just an echo of an even greater love that's pursuing us and that will never let us go.

Thank you for the gift of love and sex, Father. Thank you that you are the creator and Lord of even our sex lives. And thank you that you love your people with an even greater love that will not let us go. May we all enter and experience that love. In Jesus' name. Amen.