

# *The Song of Songs*

## *Which Is Solomon's*



"Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away."—*Song of Solomon* ii. 10.

### **A Self-Study Guide**

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## INTRODUCTION:

Of Solomon's 1005 songs, this song was supreme of them all (1 Kings 4:32). The sensuality of the Song of Songs prompted questions among both Jewish and Christian readers about whether it belonged in the canon. Nevertheless, it has firmly held its place in the Bible through the centuries. Rabbi Akiba affirmed the value of the book: "The whole world is not worth the day on which the Song of Songs was given to Israel; all the writings are holy, and the Song of Songs is the holy of holies" (New American Commentary; 367). On the eighth day of Passover, the Jews would sing portions of the Song of Solomon, a book they compared to the most holy place in the temple.

The explicit nature of portions of the Song of Songs may be a bit shocking to some readers. However, metaphorical sensual literature was not uncommon in the ancient Near East, as is seen especially in Egyptian Love Songs (IVP Bible Background Commentary; 577). In fact, there are many similarities between the language of the Song of Songs and the Egyptian love poetry written between 1300-1100 B.C.

The Song depicts courting love by contrasting true love with sensuous love. No place else in the Bible does God so address such a delicate issue and therefore the Song makes the Bible complete in every aspect. For those already married, the Song teaches what should be the foundation of marriage. The Song can teach a couple to properly base their marriage on true love and not sensuous love with the wisdom to know the difference. **1 Thessalonians 4:3-6** gives the New Testament foundation for this book. A man is admonished to know how to take a wife, not in lust but in holiness. In the Song we learn *how* to accomplish this.

## THE PROBLEM OF INTERPRETATION:

Perhaps no other book in the Old Testament has suffered under so many radically different interpretations than the Song of Songs. Below is a survey of some forms of interpretation offered toward the Song of Songs.

1. **Allegorically.** Many allegorical and symbolic interpretations of the book have been set forth in order to avoid the obvious sexual overtones. Jews have taken the book to be an allegory of the love between Yahweh and Israel. Christians have regarded it as a song of love between Christ and the church. Of course, the New Testament never interprets the Song of Songs in either of these ways. Some of the notable men who interpreted this book allegorically include Jerome, Augustine, Origen, Martin Luther, and John Calvin. While the Bible does refer to the church as the bride of Christ, such explicit sensual language found in the Song of Songs is never used to describe the relationship. Nothing in the book demands any more than a literal interpretation. It is a drama written in the form of poetry. Allegorization is now widely acknowledged to be a false reading of the text, although a few interpreters attempt to maintain this type of interpretation.
2. **Love Poetry.** This view suggests that the song is love poetry and should not be interpreted as a historical event. The "Solomon" of the poetry is likely a "poetic symbol." The text is not a record of historical events in Solomon's life. Rather, in love every groom is King Solomon, a shepherd, and even a gazelle; and every bride is a princess and country maiden. However, to suggest that biblical poetry has no historical backdrop a cause for its writing is to ignore the nature of the psalms and other Old Testament songs, such as the song of Moses and the song of Deborah. We do not read about Old Testament characters "making up" songs, as some song writers do today. Rather, the songs were written based upon life experiences and historical events, even as most song writers admit to doing today.
3. **Dramatic, historical interpretation.** This view understands the song as telling the story of courting and love between Solomon and the Shulammite girl. Within this view, there are two distinct variations of interpretation:

**Two-person drama:** In this interpretation the Song tells the story of the mutual love between Solomon and the Shulammite. Those who hold this view argue that the woman was Solomon's one true love and the Shulammite reciprocates that love. The inherent problem with this view is that Solomon had 700 wives and 300 concubines (1 Kings 11:3). It is difficult to associate a man with Solomon's reputation with a song of true love. Thus, there are two main objections to this view:

1. Solomon is hardly an example of wedded love. In fact, the one major sin of Solomon's life was his escapades with many women (**Nehemiah 13:26-27**).
2. In **6:8-9** of the Song, as Solomon woos the Shulammite, he says that she is better than the sixty queens and eighty concubines that he already has available to him. "My dove, my perfect one, is the only one...." And yet Solomon would go on to have 860 more wives and concubines! She certainly was the "only one", and so were 860 more! Homer Hailey states:  
*I believe that Solomon was infatuated with the girl's charm and beauty, but that she was in love with a shepherd lad. In the struggle within her own heart, true love triumphs. When Solomon unwittingly revealed the sensual nature of his infatuation (7:7-9a), the die was cast: her mind was completely determined to return to the shepherd. The poem is God's commendation of true mating love and His condemnation of Solomon's polygamy.*

**Three-person drama:** In this interpretation, the Song tells the story of three major characters: Solomon, the Shulammite, and the shepherd. The Song tells the story of Solomon's unsuccessful attempt to woo the girl from her true love, the rustic shepherd. The Shulammite contrasts the "love" of Solomon with the love of the shepherd shows her. She must decide what is best: marry Solomon who offers riches and greatness, but only desires her physically; or marry the shepherd who has no riches or greatness to offer, but has a true love that will sacrifice himself for her. It is this view that we will take as we study the Song of Songs, though consideration will be given to the two-person view as well.

**THE MAIN CHARACTERS:** Solomon, the Shulammite, and the Shepherd she loves. There is also a chorus of maidens that join the Shulammite while she is being wooed by Solomon.

**THE STORYLINE:** The setting first opens in the tribe of Issachar in the country town of Shunem. We learn later in the story that the girl had gone down into the valley to see the first flowers of spring. It is at this point that she was spied by one of Solomon's company and taken as a prize for the king. The king then begins to woo her with love, but when he does, she draws back and remembers the shepherd she loves. She compares Solomon to the way her shepherd feels about her. In fact, until the end of the book the shepherd does not come on the scene; he is only in the thoughts of the Shulammite. Much of the dialogue is mainly in the Shulammite's heart, in her memory.

**THE LESSON:** The book clearly demonstrates that many women cannot satisfy a man if the marriage is built on the wrong foundation. On the other hand, only one wife can easily captivate her husband all of her life if the marriage follows God's laws.

**CHALLENGES:** The problem of discovering who is speaking is certainly difficult to solve. The Hebrew aids this by using masculine and feminine pronouns. The English reader must rely on changes in pronouns, scenes, and contexts. Remember also that chapter and verse divisions do not lend itself to this kind of poetry. The NKJV will be used for this study and is included in the booklet.

## *Lesson One*

### **SCENE I**

#### **The Shulammitte [concerning the shepherd]: (1:1-4a)**

"Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth--for your love is better than wine. Because of the fragrance of your good ointments, your name is ointment poured forth; therefore the virgins love you. Lead me away!"

1. Give your own summary or paraphrase of the Shulammitte's words concerning the Shepherd:

**Husbands & Wives:** This text, as it describes the feelings of the Shulammitte, is a good test of the quality of marital love. Make a note of how the following statements describe a strong, loving relationship:

2. What has to take place in a marriage for a wife to desire her husband's kisses?
3. Why is a man's love compared to wine? What makes his love take on this quality?
4. When you read the words, "your name is ointment poured forth," what does this tell you about what a woman really loves about a man?
5. How does "lead me away" describe what a woman desires in a man?

**Singles:** The Shulammitte notes that her friends love the shepherd.

6. Why is it important for a person's friends to also love and respect the one you are dating or have chosen to marry?

#### **The Virgins, [her friends]: (1:4b)**

"We will run after you."

[The word "you" is masculine singular and therefore refers to the shepherd.]

7. What do these friends of the Shulammitte want to do?

### **The Shulammite: (1:4c)**

"The king has brought me into his chambers."

Turn to **6:11-12** to understand the circumstances under which the Shulammite has come into the king's chambers. Has she come into the king's chambers of her own free will?

### **THE DAUGHTERS OF JERUSALEM: (1:4d)**

*"We will be glad and rejoice in you. We will remember your [the king's] love more than wine."*

*[The word "you" in the first line is feminine singular and therefore refers to the Shulammite. The word "your" in the second line is masculine singular and therefore refers to the king since they are in the king's chambers.]*

8. Give your own summary or paraphrase of the words of these women of Solomon's court to the Shulammite:

**Singles:** It is often easy to be impressed with the "exterior things" of a person that you are interested in. This was a big test for the Shulammite. She could easily be impressed with these "exterior things" of the king.

9. Exterior things are the easy thing to discover about a person. Why is this dangerous in a new relationship?
10. What makes it easy for a single person to be dishonest with themselves as they attempt to discover the more important things about a person they are interested in?

### **The Shulammite: (1:4e)**

*"Rightly do they love you [the king]."*

*[the king, masculine singular]*

11. Give your own summary or paraphrase of the Shulammite's words to the king. Notice she says *"they"* love you. She does not include herself.

**Singles:** It is easy to make quick decisions about a person based upon a fantasized love or infatuation.

12. What can be done in order to avoid this mistake?

### **The Shulammite: (1:5-7)**

"I am dark, but lovely, O daughters of Jerusalem, like the tents of Kedar, like the curtains of Solomon. Do not look upon me, because I am dark, because the sun has tanned me. My mother's sons were angry with me; they made me the keeper of the vineyards, but my own vineyard I have not kept."

13. Give your own summary or paraphrase of the Shulammite's comments about herself in comparison to the daughters of Jerusalem:

**Singles:** You will notice throughout the Song that the daughters of Jerusalem have a different perspective concerning the king and love than does the Shulammite. They are enamored with the king and cannot understand why the more cautious Shulammite does not jump at the chance to marry him. You should also notice that though the Shulammite feels the peer pressure of being like these women, she does not give in to their way of thinking. She sees her own value and is comfortable with being her own person.

14. Why is the Shulammite better prepared for marriage than these pampered women of the court?

15. What about this text shows that the Shulammite has a good self-image--she not only recognizes her limitations, but also knows her strengths?

**[to her beloved shepherd]** "Tell me, O you whom I love, where you feed your flock, where you make it rest at noon. For why should I be as one who veils herself by the flocks of your companions?"

*[She wants to know where he rests his flock so that she can go straight to him without embarrassing herself by wandering from flock to flock seeking him. Under such conditions she would be considered a harlot by the other shepherds.]*

16. Give your own summary or paraphrase of the Shulammite's words:

**Singles:** In the dating relationship young people often play "games" with each other. If the woman seems to be "chasing" too much, the man withdraws from her and will not make himself as available. The woman will do the same if it seems that the man is chasing too much. As with the Shulammite, each wants to know what the other is doing. When one or the other withdraws it creates a relationship of insecurity.

17. When two people have a relationship like the one described above, what should this tell us about the quality of their "love" for each other?

**Husbands & Wives:**

18. Why is it important to a woman to know the whereabouts of her husband?
  
19. Can a woman take this to an extreme and cause her husband to feel smothered?

**Husbands:** The romantic daydreaming of the Shulammitte is typical of most women.

20. What does the daydreaming of the Shulammitte tell us about some of the important needs we should provide for our wives?

## *Lesson Two*

### **THE CHORUS (OR DAUGHTERS OF JERUSALEM): (1:8)**

"If you do not know, O fairest among women, follow in the footsteps of the flock, and feed your little goats beside the shepherds' tents." [*You might consider the words of these women as given in a mocking tone.*]

1. Give your own summary or paraphrase of the words of these virgins who are shocked that the Shulammitte would want to follow a shepherd:

**Singles; Husbands & Wives:** If the Shulammitte chooses the shepherd instead of the king, she will be giving up a *world* of opportunity.

2. Why will she be making the right choice?
  
3. When does a godly woman/wife today make similar choices?

## SCENE 2

### SOLOMON [with the Shulammitte in the royal tent]: (1:9-10)

"I have compared you, my love, to my filly among Pharaoh's chariots. Your cheeks are lovely with ornaments, your neck with chains of gold."

**REVEALING THOUGHT:** In Marcia Falk's book, *The Song of Songs*, she comments on the nature of Solomon's comparison to a filly among Pharaoh's chariots: "A woman is compared to a mare in Pharaoh's chariotry--a puzzling image, for in that context only stallions, never mares, drew chariots. But the Egyptians' enemies set mares loose in war to drive the Pharaoh's stallions wild, and this is the crux of the metaphor. The woman is not simply a beautiful creature; she is as alluring as 'a mare among stallions.' Seen in this way, the image is striking and perhaps even daunting: the beloved possesses a captivating power over her admirer."

4. Give your own summary or paraphrase of Solomon's overture of love toward the Shulammitte:

### THE DAUGHTERS OF JERUSALEM (their offer to the Shulammitte): (1:11)

"We will make you ornaments of gold with studs of silver."

5. Give your own summary or paraphrase of the virgins' supporting role:

**Singles:** Solomon's approach to the Shulammitte carries some fairly sexual overtones. Consider a similar metaphor the Lord used in **Jeremiah 5:7-8:**

"They committed adultery and trooped to the harlot's house. They were well-fed lusty horses, each one neighing after his neighbor's wife."

Further, he and the virgins, attempt to entice her with wealth and luxury.

6. What are young people today enticed with that is similar to Solomon's approach?

7. Why is it dangerous to start a relationship on this basis?

8. What is shocking about Solomon's *initial* approach?

**Husbands & Wives:** Will the Shulammitte be enticed by Solomon's sensual approach? Part of the key to her response will be how much special attention she has been given by her shepherd. Husbands and wives today often receive similar enticements that come from various sources.

9. How can we help each other in our marriages so that we do not fall prey to a sensual world?



**The Shulammitte [thinking of her shepherd in her heart]: (1:12-14)**

"While the king is at his table, my spikenard sends forth its fragrance. A bundle of myrrh is my beloved to me, that lies all night between my breasts. My beloved is to me a cluster of henna blooms in the vineyards of En Gedi."

*[Spikenard was a very expensive fragrance apparently provided by the king. A bundle of myrrh and a cluster of henna blooms were simple gifts apparently given her by the shepherd.]*

10. Give your own summary or paraphrase of the Shulammitte's thoughts:

**Single Men; Husbands:**

11. Why is a godly woman like the Shulammitte more impressed with these simple gifts than gifts of extravagance?

**SHEPHERD: [the Shulammitte remembering his words] (1:15)**

"Behold, you are fair, my love! Behold, you are fair! You have dove's eyes."

*[It is possible that 1:15 and 2:2 are actually the king speaking, but as he speaks he only triggers in the Shulammitte's mind thoughts of love for the shepherd.]*

12. Give your own summary or paraphrase of the shepherd's words, especially noting the meaning of "fair", "my love", and "dove's eyes":

**The Shulammitte [thinking of the shepherd]: (1:16--2:1)**

"Behold, you are handsome, my beloved! Yes, pleasant! Also our bed is green. The beams of our houses are cedar, and our rafters of fir. I am the rose of Sharon, and the lily of the valleys."

*[Contrast the chambers of Solomon to the simple "home" or meeting place she had with the shepherd. "Bed" is literally "day-couch". Remember that Jesus made reference to the lilies of the field in **Matthew 6:28-29**. There was no beauty like them, but they were also very abundant.]*

13. Give your own summary or paraphrase of the Shulammitte's response:

**SHEPHERD: (2:2)**

"Like a lily among thorns, so is my love among the daughters."

14. Give your own summary or paraphrase of the shepherd's words:

### **The Shulammite [thinking of the shepherd]: (2:3-7)**

*"Like an apple tree among the trees of the woods, so is my beloved among the sons. I sat down in his shade with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste."*

15. Give your own summary or paraphrase of the Shulammite's thoughts as she expresses the security and benefits of her relationship:

### **Husbands & Wives:**

16. What is the importance of verbal expressions of love between husband and wife?
17. Contrast the "lily" with the "apple tree". What do these figures of speech tell us about the differences between men and women and their roles?

### **Singles:**

18. Consider the phrases, "lily among thorns" and "apple tree among the trees of the woods." What do these phrases tell us about who we should choose as our life-long mate?

### **[to the daughters of Jerusalem concerning the shepherd]:**

*"He brought me to the banqueting house, and his banner over me was love. Sustain me with cakes of raisins, refresh me with apples, for I am lovesick. His left hand is under my head, and his right hand embraces me. I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, by the gazelles or by the does of the field, do not stir up nor awaken love until it pleases."*

*["Banqueting house" literally means "house of wine" or "house of vines". The Shulammite may be referring to a simple vine arbor where she longs to meet the shepherd. "Banner" refers to a rallying point that rendered confidence to soldiers. What she describes has apparently not happened yet. Contrast the simple meal offered by the shepherd with the banquet the king is offering.]*

19. Give your own summary or paraphrase of the Shulammite's words to the virgins (What is her main message to the virgins?):

**Husbands:** Men often struggle with the concept of what it means to be the "head of the wife" or to be a leader in the family. Consider the phrase, **"his banner over me was love"**.

20. How does this phrase describe how a husband leads in his family? Please be specific!

**Singles:** The Shulammite warns the virgins not to stir up or awaken love until it pleases. She did not appreciate their attempts to force a love relationship between her and the king when there had not been time for the two of them to really get to know one another.

21. What mistakes are often made today in dating relationships that also violate this principle?

**REVEALING THOUGHT:** Don DeWalt writes, "Of all persons our wives know the meaning of verse seven. When artificial or crude means are used in a vain attempt to awaken love the results might be disastrous! If we are not willing to accept the nature of love as possessed by our wives we had best leave the lovely creature in the seclusion of her own forest. She is willing to come out, nay she wants to be found--but not with a bull horn! If courtship is not continued beyond marriage we are due to find out just how strong and cruel love can be--and we deserve it!" (Song of Solomon, College Press, 349)

### *Lesson Three*

#### **SCENE 3**

#### **The Shulammite [remembering the shepherd's visit]: (2:8-14)**

"The voice of my beloved! Behold, he comes leaping upon the mountains, skipping upon the hills. My beloved is like a gazelle or a young stag. Behold, he stands behind our wall; he is looking through the windows, gazing through the lattice.

My beloved spoke, and said to me:

'Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away. For lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone. The flowers appear on the earth; the time of singing has come, and the voice of the turtledove is heard in our land. The fig tree puts forth her green figs, and the vines with the tender grapes give a good smell. Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away! O my dove, in the clefts of the rock, in the secret places of the cliff, let me see your countenance, let me hear your voice; for your voice is sweet, and your countenance is lovely.'

1. Give your own summary or paraphrase of how the Shulammite remembers the shepherd. Pay special attention to the character of the shepherd and what he wants from the Shulammite:

### **Husbands; Single Men:**

2. How does the Shulammite's description of the shepherd teach us what women desire in their men?
  
3. The shepherd refers to the Shulammite as a dove in the clefts of the rock and calls her out so that he might see her face and hear her voice. From this we can identify one of our wife's greatest needs (Compare I Peter 3:7):

### **[Shulammite to shepherd] (2:15)**

*"Catch us the foxes, the little foxes that spoil the vines, for our vines have tender grapes."*

*[Understand vines and tender grapes to refer to the young and tender relationship between the Shulammite and the shepherd.]*

4. Give your own summary or paraphrase of what the Shulammite is asking the shepherd to do:

**Singles:** Whatever has proved itself to be a problem during dating will usually magnify itself a hundredfold after marriage.

5. What are some of the things that should be resolved prior to marriage so that "the foxes don't spoil the vines"?

### **Husbands & Wives:**

6. How important is it to continue to "catch the foxes that spoil the vines" after marriage? This is very often neglected. How can we keep from neglecting it?

### **[to the daughters of Jerusalem] (2:16)**

*"My beloved is mine, and I am his. He feeds his flock among the lilies."*

*[Remember that before the Shulammite started this "daydreaming session" (1:12–2:15), the virgins had mockingly told her to go find her shepherd boy.]*

7. Give your own summary or paraphrase of the Shulammite's words:

### **[to her shepherd] (2:17)**

"Until the day breaks ("be cool" ASV) and the shadows flee away, turn, my beloved, and be like a gazelle or a young stag upon the mountains of Bether."

*["Bether" is located in a mountainous region on the east side of Jordan. The word "Bether" comes from a root word which means "to chop up or divide" (Strong's Concordance) and thus a separation or division. The Shulammitte uses this mountain to allude to the separation between them as well as difficulties they will need to overcome in order to be together.]*

8. Give your own summary or paraphrase of the Shulammitte's encouragement to the shepherd:

**Husbands & Wives:** It is sad that in so many marriages today, both people are not intent on being strong and quick to cross the craggy mountains that sometimes lie between them.

9. When difficulties arise in a marriage what is the obligation of both parties regardless of who is perceived to be in the wrong?

### **Husbands, Wives, & Singles:**

10. Explain how the phrase, "he is mine and I am his" describes the kind of relationship shared between the Shulammitte and the shepherd.

11. If you are serious about a person you are dating but are unable to say, "he is mine and I am his", what should your concerns be?

## *Lesson Four*

### **SCENE 4**

#### **The Shulammitte [her dream]: (3:1-5)**

"By night on my bed I sought the one I love; I sought him, but I did not find him. 'I will rise now,' I said, 'and go about the city; in the streets and in the squares I will seek the one I love.' I sought him, but I did not find him. The watchmen who go about the city found me, to whom I said, 'Have you seen the one I love?'"

Scarcely had I passed by them, when I found the one I love. I held him and would not let him go, until I had brought him to the house of my mother, and into the chamber of her who conceived me. I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, by the gazelles or by the does of the field, do not stir up nor awaken love until it pleases."

1. Give your own summary or paraphrase of the Shulammite's dream and what it means as concerns her feelings about her relationship with the shepherd:

**Singles:** In many ways the separation between the Shulammite and the shepherd has not been bad.

2. List some of the benefits of periodic separations between dating couples:

Did you notice that the shepherd isn't moping around outside Solomon's camp upset that the Shulammite is being wooed by the king or is considering a relationship with the king?

3. Why was it important that the shepherd kept his distance?

**Husbands & Wives:** The insecurities that are often found in dating relationships and that is demonstrated by the Shulammite in this part of the Song should never be found in marriage.

4. What are some of the things that should not happen in a marriage which could cause your mate to doubt your allegiance and devotion to him/her and the marriage?

**REVEALING THOUGHT:** The shepherd was wise enough not to follow the Shulammite. Instead, he allowed her the freedom and the respect to make her own decision. This same kind of respect must be carried over into marriage. Neither husband or wife has a right to bully the other. Each must respect the other's individuality and right to make personal choices. Even the Lord allows us that freedom in our relationship with Him.

## **SCENE 5 [the royal procession into Jerusalem]**

### **FIRST CITIZEN: (3:6)**

"Who is this coming out of the wilderness like pillars of smoke, perfumed with myrrh and frankincense, with all the merchant's fragrant powders?"

### **SECOND CITIZEN: (3:7-8)**

"Behold, it is Solomon's couch, with sixty valiant men around it, of the valiant of Israel. They all hold swords, being expert in war. Every man has his sword on his thigh because of fear in the night."

### **THIRD CITIZEN: (3:9-11)**

"Of the wood of Lebanon Solomon the king made himself a palanquin. He made its pillars of silver, its support of gold, its seat of purple, its interior paved with love by the daughters of Jerusalem. Go forth, O daughters of Zion, and see king Solomon with the crown with which his mother crowned him on the day of his espousals, the day of the gladness of his heart."

*[Notice that Solomon is wearing the crown that he would wear on the day he would become engaged to be married. What is Solomon trying to accomplish with all the pomp and ceremony of this royal procession?]*

5. Give your own summary or paraphrase of the description of Solomon's entrance into Jerusalem:

### **Singles:**

6. If the Shulammitte were to agree to marry Solomon at this point in the story, what would be her motives for marriage?

## **ACT 2**

### **SCENE 1**

#### **SOLOMON (his second effort): (4:1-5)**

"Behold, you are fair, my love! behold, you are fair! You have *dove's eyes* behind your veil. Your hair is like a flock of *goats*, going down from Mount Gilead. Your *teeth* are like a flock of shorn sheep which have come up from the washing, every one of which bears twins, and none is barren among them. Your lips are like a strand of scarlet, and your mouth is lovely. Your temples behind your veil are like a piece of pomegranate. Your neck is like the tower of David, built for an armory, on which hang a thousand bucklers, all shields of mighty men. Your two breasts are like two fawns, twins of a gazelle, which feed among the lilies."

7. Give your own summary or paraphrase of Solomon's attempt to dazzle the Shulammitte into marriage, especially explaining the metaphors he uses to describe her beauty:

Dove's eyes:

Hair like a flock of goats:

Teeth:

Temples:

Neck:

Breasts:

**Singles:** It is significant that later in **6:4-9** when Solomon makes a third attempt to woo the Shulammite he uses almost the same words.

8. In a dating relationship, though such words are flattering, what should they indicate about the character of the man who is saying them?

9. Why doesn't Solomon speak of her character, her personality, and her inward qualities?

**Husbands:** It is common, especially for newly married men, to be preoccupied with their wife's physical attributes.

10. While complimenting her physical appearance is important, why is this damaging to your relationship if you do not also compliment her inward character and the things she does?

**Shulammite: (4:6)**

"Until the day breaks and the shadows flee away, I will go my way to the mountain of myrrh and to the hill of frankincense."

*[Gardens were numerous around the cities of Palestine and were commonly used by the Jews as a retreat from the pressures of the day.]*

11. Give your own summary or paraphrase of the Shulammite's response to the king's attempt:

**Singles:**

12. What do you find wise about the Shulammite's response?

**SOLOMON: (4:7)**

"You are all fair, my love, and there is no spot in you."

13. Give your own summary or paraphrase of the king's parting words:

**Singles:**

14. Why should you be suspicious of a person who told you that they could not find any flaw in you?



## *Lesson Five*

### **SHEPHERD (as remembered in the heart of the Shulammitte): (4:8-15)**

"Come with me from Lebanon, my spouse, with me from Lebanon. Look from the top of Amana, from the top of Senir and Hermon, from the lions' dens, from the mountains of the leopards. You have ravished my heart, my sister, my spouse; you have ravished my heart with one look of your eyes, with one link of your necklace. How fair is your love, my sister, my spouse! How much better than wine is your love, and the scent of your perfumes than all spices! Your lips, O my spouse, drip as the honeycomb; honey and milk are under your tongue; and the fragrance of your garments is like the fragrance of Lebanon. A garden enclosed is my sister, my spouse, a spring shut up, a fountain sealed. Your plants are an orchard of pomegranates with pleasant fruits, fragrant henna with spikenard, spikenard and saffron, calamus and cinnamon, with all trees of frankincense, myrrh and aloes, with all the chief spices--a fountain of gardens, a well of living waters, and streams from Lebanon."

### **REVEALING THOUGHTS:**

- (1) The heights of Lebanon, Amana, Senir and Hermon were dangerous places for the Shulammitte to be. The words, "Look from the top of..." are translated in the marginal reading of the ASV as, "Go from the top of..."
- (2) Solomon had referred to the Shulammitte as "my love" ("a female associate", --Strong's). But the shepherd refers to her as "my spouse" and "my sister".
- (3) Notice also the contrast between Solomon's description of the Shulammitte and the shepherd's description. Compare the words "garden enclosed" and "spring shut up" to **Proverbs 5:15-18**.

1. Give your own summary or paraphrase of the shepherd's approach to the Shulammitte:

**Husbands; Single Men:** When a man is ready to marry he should be able to say of his bride, "my sister, my spouse" not just "my love".

2. What is the difference between the two statements? Compare **1 Peter 3:7**.

**Husbands, Wives, & Singles:** The shepherd is not going into this relationship with the idea that he has to change and improve his bride. He was not only content with what she had to offer, but he recognized the many gifts that she would bring into their marriage.

3. Why is it important to have an attitude like the shepherd's when contemplating marriage?

**Shulammite: (4:16)**

"Awake, O north wind, and come, O south! Blow upon my garden, that its spices may flow out. Let my beloved come to his garden and eat its pleasant fruits."

*[If the shepherd's words were a proposal of marriage, these words are certainly an acceptance.]*

4. Give your own summary or paraphrase of the Shulammite's response to the shepherd:

**Wives:** The attitude of the Shulammite is what pleases God and what every man desires in his wife.

5. Why is this attitude so important to a successful marriage?

**SHEPHERD: (5:1a)**

"I have come to my garden, my sister, my spouse; I have gathered my myrrh with my spice; I have eaten my honeycomb with my honey; I have drunk my wine with my milk."

6. Give your own summary or paraphrase of the shepherd's assurances to the Shulammite:

**CHORUS: (5:1b)**

"Eat, O friends! Drink, yes, drink deeply, O beloved ones!"

7. Give your own summary or paraphrase of the response of the chorus:

**Husbands & Wives:** The chorus has encouraged the couple to enjoy completely and fully all the blessings of their marriage. Unfortunately, most couples do not avail themselves of all that marriage has to offer.

8. Why don't couples enjoy marriage to its fullest potential?

## *Lesson Six*

### **SCENE 2**

#### **Shulammite (her second dream): (5:2a)**

"I sleep, but my heart is awake; it is the voice of my beloved! He knocks, saying,

#### **SHEPHERD: (5:2b)**

'Open for me, my sister, my love, my dove, my perfect one; for my head is covered with dew, my locks with the drops of the night.'

#### **Shulammite: (5:3-8)**

"I have taken off my robe; how can I put it on again? I have washed my feet; how can I defile them? My beloved put his hand by the latch of the door, and my heart yearned for him. I arose to open for my beloved, and my hands dripped with myrrh, my fingers with liquid myrrh, on the handles of the lock. I opened for my beloved, but my beloved had turned away and was gone. My heart went out to him when he spoke. I sought him, but I could not find him; I called him, but he gave me no answer. The watchmen who went about the city found me. They struck me, they wounded me; the keepers of the walls took my veil away from me. I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, if you find my beloved, that you tell him I am lovesick!"

**REVEALING THOUGHT:** [Don DeWalt gives an excellent narrative that gives the sense and feeling of this dream of the Shulammite: "I was asleep but I was constantly aware of my beloved from whom I am separated. All at once he was at the gate! I heard his voice--he knocked--he called to me: 'Open blood of my blood, love of my heart, my alert soft one, my purest one. I have been long in coming to you over many mountains. I have come--all through the night I have hastened to your side--my head is wet with dew. Let me in.' I turned on my bed--I hardly knew what was happening. So very foolishly I thought only of myself--'I cannot go to him--I have undressed and bathed for bed--I cannot go out in the courtyard to the gate I will soil my feet.' I looked toward the door--he had already entered the courtyard and was even now at the door of our house. His hand appeared through the hole near the door and attempted to unlock the door. When I saw his dear hand my heart almost stopped. I hardly knew what I was doing--I jumped out of bed and threw a mantle over myself--I thought 'I must meet him with perfume'--I dipped my hands in myrrh--I hurried to the door, I could not move the lock or hold the handles of the door so full were my fingers with myrrh. When I did at least get the doors open, my beloved was gone! I was beside myself--Perhaps he came in another way--I looked in every room of these courts--he was nowhere to be found. I could yet hear his voice and his dear words of love--I called him, I called him again--there was no answer. I must find him. I will find him. I ran out the open door--across the courtyard and out into the streets of the city. I had no sooner entered the streets than the watchmen were all around me. One of them struck me. It was a heavy blow--I can yet feel the pain. One of the sentinels jerked my veil from me. I do not blame them, I must have appeared as a wanton woman wandering the streets at that hour. Was it only a dream--it was so real--was he really here?" (Bible Study Textbook, College Press, 396)

1. Give your own summary of what was going on in the Shulammite's mind to cause her to dream about temporarily withdrawing from the shepherd when he came to call on her:

2. Why does the shepherd leave?

3. What does the Shulammitte learn from this experience in her dream?

**Husbands, Wives, & Singles:** Notice again that the shepherd does not force himself into the presence of the Shulammitte. As much as he wants to see her, he respects her freedom of choice and individuality.

4. How should this attitude be applied in the dating and marriage relationship?

### **DAUGHTERS OF JERUSALEM: (5:9)**

"What is your beloved more than another beloved, O fairest among women? What is your beloved more than another beloved, that you so charge us?"

*[This question was probably given in a mocking tone.]*

5. Give your own summary or paraphrase of the statement of these women to the Shulammitte:

### **Shulammitte: (5:10-16)**

"My beloved is white and ruddy, chief among ten thousand. His head is like the finest gold; his locks are wavy, and black as a raven. His eyes are like doves by the rivers of waters, washed with milk, and fitly set. His cheeks are like a bed of spices, like banks of scented herbs. His lips are lilies, dripping liquid myrrh. His hands are rods of gold set with beryl. His body is carved ivory inlaid with sapphires. His legs are pillars of marble set on bases of fine gold. His countenance is like Lebanon, excellent as the cedars. His mouth is most sweet, yes, he is altogether lovely. This is my beloved, and this is my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem!"

*[Though the Shulammitte's description of the shepherd mainly speaks of his appearance (which these carnally minded virgins would have been more impressed with), note that she does mention some significant inner qualities as well. The word "lovely" means "desirable, pleasant, delightful" (Theological Wordbook, 294).]*

6. Give your own summary or paraphrase of the Shulammitte's description. Pay careful attention to those descriptions that might suggest more than just physical appearance:

**Wives; Single Women:** Did you notice that the Shulammitte makes no mention of the kind of work he did and yet she referred to him as "chief among ten thousand." In our society we tend to place a lot of weight on what a man does for a living.

7. Why is this in incorrect evaluation of a man?

8. How does the instruction to wives in **Ephesians 5:33** fit with the Shulammitte's description of the shepherd?

**Husbands; Single Men:** The qualities the shepherd has are the qualities all men should strive for. Look beyond just the physical appearance of these attributes to see the character of the man. For example, "*body of carved ivory*" shows that this man is accustomed to hard work (this shepherd wasn't out weight lifting!).

9. Make a note of the attributes of the shepherd that you think men today have a problem meeting up to:

### *Lesson Seven*

#### **DAUGHTERS OF JERUSALEM: (6:1)**

"Where has your beloved gone, O fairest among women? Where has your beloved turned aside, that we may seek him with you?"

*[Upon hearing the Shulammitte's description, have these ladies become interested in the shepherd too?]*

1. Give your own summary or paraphrase of the response of the virgins:

#### **Shulammitte: (6:2-3)**

"My beloved has gone to his garden, to the beds of spices, to feed his flock in the gardens, and to gather lilies. I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine. He feeds his flock among the lilies."

2. Give your own summary or paraphrase of the words of the Shulammitte which seem to reject the suggestion of the virgins:

**Husbands & Wives:** The relationship between the shepherd and the Shulammite was exclusive, unlike what the ladies of the court were accustomed to. Many a marriage has been destroyed by fornication today which was a result of couples not maintaining the proper lines in their friendships.

3. To avoid fornication, what are the *first* lines that should be drawn?

**Husbands; Single Men:**

4. Did you notice what the shepherd is doing? It is the same thing that women desire from us today:

**SCENE 3 (Solomon's third effort)**

**SOLOMON: (6:4-9)**

"O my love, you are as beautiful as Tirzah, lovely as Jerusalem, awesome as an army with banners! Turn your eyes away from me, for they have overcome me. Your hair is like a flock of goats going down from Gilead. Your teeth are like a flock of sheep which have come up from the washing; every one bears twins, and none is barren among them. Like a piece of pomegranate are your temples behind your veil. There are sixty queens and eighty concubines, and virgins without number. My dove, my perfect one, is the only one, the only one of her mother, the favorite of the one who bore her. The daughters saw her and called her blessed, the queens and the concubines, and they praised her."

*[The cities of Tirzah and Jerusalem were the two most beautiful cities in Palestine. Tirzah was located about 10 miles due east of Samaria. Both cities were situated on mountain tops and thus fit well with the analogy that Solomon is presenting. Notice that he compares the Shulammite to three things: Tirzah, Jerusalem, and an army with banners. Each of these, though beautiful, are objects of intimidation and considered unconquerable. When Solomon says, "your eyes...have **overcome me**", ASV margin translates "**made me afraid**", and NASB says, "**confused me**". Compare this to 4:9 where the shepherd is captivated by her look.]*

5. Give your own summary or paraphrase of Solomon's third effort toward the Shulammite:
6. What about Solomon's words give the indication that his desire for the Shulammite is not true love?

**Husbands & Wives; Singles:** Solomon had already married 140 women. He will marry 860 more.

7. Men, what are some things that this teaches us about our relationship with women?
8. Ladies, what are some things you learn about certain men from Solomon's words?

### **DAUGHTERS OF JERUSALEM: (6:10)**

"Who is she who looks forth as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, awesome as an army with banners?"

*[These ladies ask this question as they are amazed that the Shulammite has refused the king.]*

9. Give your own summary or paraphrase of the virgins' question to the Shulammite:

### **Shulammite: (6:11-12)**

"I went down to the garden of nuts to see the verdure of the valley, to see whether the vine had budded and the pomegranates had bloomed. Before I was even aware, my soul had made me as the chariots of my noble people."

10. Give your own summary or paraphrase of the Shulammite's description of how she came to be in Solomon's presence:

### **DAUGHTERS OF JERUSALEM: (6:13a)**

"Return, return, O Shulammite; return, return, that we may look upon you!"

11. Give your own summary or paraphrase of the virgins' plea to the Shulammite (*What decision has the Shulammite apparently made?*):

### **Shulammite: (6:13b)**

"What would you see in the Shulammite--as it were, the dance of the double camp?"

*[The dance of the double camp, or literally Mahanaim (a town about 15 miles east of the Jordan in Gilead), was apparently some sort of sensual dance commonly performed for dignitaries or for public entertainment.]*

12. Give your own summary or paraphrase of the Shulammite's response to the virgins:

## *Lesson Eight*

### **DAUGHTERS OF JERUSALEM: (7:1-5)**

"How beautiful are your feet in sandals, O prince's daughter! The curves of your thighs are like jewels, the work of the hands of a skillful workman. Your navel is a rounded goblet which lacks no blended beverage. Your waist is a heap of wheat set about with lilies. Your two breasts are like two fawns, twins of a gazelle. Your neck is like an ivory tower, your eyes like the pools in Heshbon by the gate of Bath Rabbim. Your nose is like the tower of Lebanon which looks toward Damascus. Your head crowns you like Mount Carmel, and the hair of your head is like purple; the king is held captive by its tresses."

1. Give your own summary or paraphrase of what the virgins are encouraging the Shulammitte to do:

**Single Women:** These women of the court are encouraging the relationship between the king and the Shulammitte on a very sensual basis.

2. What are some of the ways that young women today commonly try to attract a man on the basis of sensuality instead of by inner character (compare I Timothy 2:9-10)?

#### **Wives:**

3. How do married women often make a similar mistake in how they present themselves before the world (compare I Timothy 2:9-10 & I Peter 3:1-6)?

### **SOLOMON (his final attempt): (7:6-9a)**

"How fair and how pleasant you are, O love, with your delights! This stature of yours is like a palm tree, and your breasts like its clusters. I said, 'I will go up to the palm tree, I will take hold of its branches.' Let now your breasts be like clusters of the vine, the fragrance of your breath like apples, and the roof of your mouth like the best wine."

4. Give your own summary or paraphrase of Solomon's final appeal to the Shulammitte: (What has obviously been going in his mind?)

**Husbands, Wives, & Singles:** As noted before, the king had 140 other women.

5. What kind of relationship do you imagine that he has had with his wives?



6. What do you learn about carnal men from this? (Consider the warning of I Thessalonians 4:4-5)

7. What do you learn about relationships built on physical attraction?

**Singles:** Solomon was surely seeking true love.

8. Do you think he ever found it? Why or why not?

**Shulammite: (7:9b-10)**

*"The wine goes down smoothly for my beloved, moving gently the lips of sleepers. I am my beloved's, and his desire is toward me."*

*[The word "smoothly" is significant here. The word means "that which is right, righteous, prosperous; sweetly, uprightly" (Strong). Theological Wordbook defines the word as, "be level, straight, upright, just, lawful." The phrase, "moving gently the lips of the sleepers" is translated in a number of different ways, but apparently indicates how her wine will cause a sweet taste to the lips and bring peaceful sleep to her beloved.]*

9. Give your own summary or paraphrase of the Shulammite's interruption of the king's thoughts and her rebuke:

**Husbands, Wives, & Singles:**

10. What is the importance of the phrase, *"his (the shepherd) desire is toward me."*

**Singles:** It is pure fantasy to believe that sex without the commitment of marriage and a monogamous relationship will be satisfying. Yet our whole society is following this fantasy. As the practice of living together before marriage has become the norm, the divorce rate has skyrocketed.

11. What should you learn about the folly of sexual activities before marriage?

12. What has the Shulammite taught you about how to handle a person of the opposite gender who makes a proposition like Solomon's?

**Husbands & Wives:**

13. The shepherd's desire was for the Shulammite. Where is your desire?

**(to the shepherd) (7:11--8:2)**

"Come, my beloved, let us go forth to the field; let us lodge in the villages. Let us get up early to the vineyards; let us see if the vine has budded, whether the grape blossoms are open, and the pomegranates are in bloom. There I will give you my love. The mandrakes give off a fragrance, and at our gates are pleasant fruits, all manner, new and old, which I have laid up for you, my beloved. Oh, that you were like my brother, who nursed at my mother's breasts! If I should find you outside, I would kiss you; I would not be despised. I would lead you and bring you into the house of my mother, she who used to instruct me. I would cause you to drink of spiced wine, of the juice of my pomegranate."

*[Mandrakes were considered a fertility potion (Genesis 30:14).]*

14. Give your own summary or paraphrase of the Shulammite's call to the shepherd to go on their honeymoon:

**Husbands & Wives:**

15. Where did the Shulammite learn to have such a healthy view of love so that she was even able to turn down the advances of a lustful king?

*Lesson Nine*

**(to the daughters of Jerusalem) (8:3-4)**

"His left hand is under my head, and his right hand embraces me. I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, do not stir up nor awaken love until it pleases."

*[If, as many have commented, this is a book that exalts a love affair between Solomon and the Shulammite, why is this particular refrain so often repeated, and especially, why is it repeated in this context?]*

1. Give your own summary or paraphrase of the Shulammite's final words to the virgins:

**ACT 3**

**SCENE I**

**CHORUS OF COUNTRY PEOPLE: (8:5a)**

"Who is this coming up from the wilderness, leaning upon her beloved?"

2. Give your own summary or paraphrase of what is taking place in this scene:

**Wives, Single Women:**

3. What can you learn about your relationship with your husband from the phrase, "*leaning upon her beloved*"?

**SHEPHERD: (8:5b)**

"I awakened you under the apple tree. There your mother brought you forth; there she who bore you brought you forth."

4. Give your own summary or paraphrase of the conditions under which the shepherd had awakened the love of the Shulammite (note how different this is to the approach by Solomon and the women of his court):

**Singles:** To awaken love in a pure and upright way one must do so in surroundings that lend themselves to purity.

5. What lessons can you learn about dating from the way the shepherd dated the Shulammite?

**Husbands & Wives:** There is principle here that teaches us about awakening love within the marriage. Many couples, after years of troubles and mistreatment of one another, complain that they have "fallen out of love."

6. How does the shepherd's approach to the Shulammite address this problem?

**Shulammite: (8:6-7)**

"Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm; for love is as strong as death, jealousy as cruel as the grave; its flames are flames of fire, a most vehement flame. Many waters cannot quench love, nor can the floods drown it. If a man would give for love all the wealth of his house, it would be utterly despised."

[A "seal" is a sign of ownership.]

7. Give your own summary or paraphrase of the Shulammite's charge to the shepherd:

**Husbands & Wives:** These words by the Shulammite gives the key to a marriage lasting until "death do us part".

8. Make a list of the things the Shulammite alludes to that will give permanence to a marriage:

## **SCENE 2**

### **(Shulammite's brothers)**

#### **FIRST BROTHER: (8:8)**

*"We have a little sister, and she has no breasts. What shall we do for our sister in the day when she is spoken for?"*

#### **SECOND BROTHER: (8:9)**

*"If she is a wall, we will build upon her a battlement of silver; and if she is a door, we will enclose her with boards of cedar."*

9. Give your own summary or paraphrase of this conversation of the brothers of the Shulammite:

**Parents:** The brothers speak of how they will best guide a younger sister when she comes of age. Their response depends upon her character.

10. What kind of character is shown in the phrase, "If she is a wall"?

11. What kind of character is shown in the phrase, "If she is a door"?

12. How should parents respond differently to these contrasting personalities in their children?

#### **Singles:**

13. If you want to be given more freedom by your parents, what does this passage indicate that you should do?

**Shulammite: (8:10-12)**

"I am a wall, and my breasts like towers; then I became in his eyes as one who found peace. Solomon had a vineyard at Baal Hamon; he leased the vineyard to keepers; everyone was to bring for its fruit a thousand pieces of silver. My own vineyard is before me. You, O Solomon, may have a thousand, and those who keep its fruit two hundred."

*[Apparently Solomon had offered the Shulammite or her family a very large and prosperous vineyard. This may have been offered as a dowry or maybe even a kind of bribe to encourage the Shulammite to marry him.]*

14. Give your own summary or paraphrase of the Shulammite's final words toward Solomon:

**Husbands & Wives, Singles:**

15. What caused the Shulammite to have inner peace?

16. How is this different from the way peace is generally sought after?

**CLOSING SCENE****SHEPHERD (to the Shulammite): (8:13)**

"You who dwell in the gardens, the companions listen for your voice--let me hear it!"

*[Shulammite, who will you choose to marry?]*

17. Give your own summary or paraphrase of the invitation of the shepherd:

**Shulammite: (8:14)**

"Make haste, my beloved, and be like a gazelle or a young stag on the mountains of spices."

18. Give your own summary or paraphrase of the response of the Shulammite:

**CONCLUSION:** The shepherd and the Shulammite have given us lofty goals for our dating and marriage relationships. Will we respond by saying we do not need to follow these instructions because times have changed? Or, will we disregard these admonitions because we reason that *our* relationship is different and we like it that way? How foolish! How sinful! God is offering each of us the beauty of the love found between the shepherd and Shulammite if we will only follow His plan and His pattern for love between a man and a woman. God bless each of us in that pursuit.