

Song 1v15-2v7

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[0 : 00] Well, please head in your Bibles to page 560, to the Song of Solomon, or the Song of Songs, as we have the title on the beginning of the book.

! The Song of Songs on page 560. And we read earlier from verse 15 to 2 verse 7. I look and stare so deep in your eyes. I touch you more and more every time. When you leave, I'm begging you not to go.

Call your name two or three times in a row. Such a funny thing for me to try to explain how I'm feeling, and my pride is the one to blame.

Because I know I don't understand just how your love can do what no one else can. You've got me looking so crazy right now. Your love's got me looking so crazy right now in love. So said the great poet, Beyonce.

Or how about this? Every time you look at me, my heart is jumping. It's easy to see. Loving you means so much more than anything I ever felt before.

[1 : 19] You drive me crazy. I just can't sleep. I'm so excited. I'm in too deep. Yes, that was Britney. What is the difference between those songs and this song here?

I mean, apart from the fact that this song is much older, and all the flower and animal imagery we have here, they're not all that far apart, are they? At least in the bits that I quoted for you.

And that in itself is worth noting. This is a song that shows us a man and a woman who are madly and deeply in love with each other.

The first half is them talking to each other. You can see the he and she. And then the second half is her talking to her friends about him.

And this pair are crazy in love. And yet we find this song in the Bible. It's a song given to us by God himself.

[2 : 21] And more than that, what section of the Bible are we in? This is in the midst of all the wisdom books. This beautiful song, this song of songs, the best song, is trying to teach us some wisdom.

I should have checked more carefully probably, but I'm just assuming that wasn't part of Beyonce's or Britney's agenda when they wrote their songs. So how can this passionate love song between a man and a woman teach us wisdom?

Well, to figure it out, we need to go on a few field trips. We're going to go to four different places to learn four different lessons. And hopefully we'll come out the other end a bit wiser.

So, we'll need to go to the art gallery to learn that this is it. Then we need to go to the battlefield to learn that this is not always it.

Then we need to go to the gym to learn that this is not it. And then the temple to learn that this is it. What are we on about? Well, let's start off by going to the art gallery to learn that this is it.

[3 : 33] As we arrive at the art gallery, we see this beautiful picture of love and marriage as God imagined it, as he designed it, as he created it.

And when you look at it, you think of all the reviews that you've read of this painting. And you see that it's clear that it's been massively underrated. This is better than how most Christians describe it.

This is better than how the scientists describe it. It's better than how the culture describes it. It is just stunning. Now, when you look at this picture, you realize that we have massively dismantled what marriage really is.

We have taken it apart. And I'm not just talking in terms of changing the legal definitions of who can marry whom, or in terms of watering down the standards for divorce.

That is just part of it. It goes far deeper. We have taken it apart bit by bit. I have a bit of a running joke with my mother about a politician called Sir Malcolm Rifkind.

[4 : 42] If you don't know who he is, you don't need to worry. I'll just tell you that he's a rather posh, straight-laced, serious man. And one night, years ago, he was on television, probably news night or question time or something like that.

And my mother just said she'd always wondered how Malcolm Rifkind speaks to his wife. Because he's just such a serious-looking man. So she does a rather funny impression of how she imagines he would speak to his wife.

Hello, my darling. One loves you all very much. And that might be totally unfair to Malcolm Rifkind. I don't know. But I think a lot of us can tend to think that the Bible is a bit like that.

So here are two people who have fallen madly in love. And then along comes the Bible. And just sort of goes all Malcolm Rifkind on them. It's all very well.

It's all very good that you want to be together. But we need to organise a legal ceremony for you. And here's the contract to sign. And you have to promise to stick together for life.

[5 : 46] And here are the rules. And here are your duties. And as long as you do this and that. And do help each other in these ways. You're good to go. And just try not to enjoy it too much. I think that's how we think the Bible says it.

And some people's belief that the Bible is like that. Is because some Christians are like that. The Church Father Augustine. Having been quite sexually immoral before his conversion.

Went so far as to say that the ideal way to go was a celibate marriage. So get married and just stay friends. And don't enjoy it. But you'll find an equally cold description in the way scientists might describe marriage.

It's just about pairing off and mating and perpetuating your genes. It's all sort of cold and clinical, isn't it? And then over on the other extreme of things.

The culture presents love and romance as something that's only and exclusively to do with feelings and desires and passion. Love is love.

[6 : 49] It doesn't matter whom you love. Or how many people you love in a lifetime. Or how exclusively you love them. Or how long you love them for. Or the fewer rules and regulations, the better.

Just go with the flow and do whatever you want. Pretty much everyone's definition of romance and marriage focuses on just one part of the picture.

And then it ignores all the rest. But here's what we get when we look at this full picture. We get breathlessness at the beauty.

It's especially true of the man. It's probably why he does so little of the talking here. She has taken his breath away. Our passage starts in 115. Behold, you are beautiful, my love.

It's a bit of a Malcolm Rifkin translation. That little word, behold, at least in this context, is probably best translated, Wow! How beautiful you are!

[7 : 54] Now why exactly he says her eyes are like doves is not all that clear. So commentators will spend quite a while debating it. It's their job, to be fair. But while they argue, we can at least notice that he is just mesmerized as he gazes into her eyes.

Her beauty blows him away. And she actually doesn't think she's anything that special. In verse 1 of chapter 2, she's not praising herself there. When she calls herself a rose, or better, an asphodel or a wildflower of Sharon.

Sharon was this plain covered in wildflowers. And then she calls herself the lily of the valley.

Meaning just another of the many little lilies, which are two a penny, in the valley.

She's being self-deprecating here. But in verse 2, he is having none of it. She's like a lily among brambles. She is like no other.

She's amazing. He hasn't got eyes for anybody else. When the day comes. When he sees her walking down the aisle. Whatever she may think of herself, and whatever anyone else thinks of her.

[9 : 05] To him, she is the most beautiful woman on the planet. And likewise for her. He's like an apple tree that totally stands out from the generic background of the forest. There's also delight in the differences.

The way they complement each other here is different. You'll notice. They're not interchangeable partners in the partnership. The man and woman are distinct.

And they play a different role in the marriage and in the role they play in the song. That it wouldn't make sense to swap a man for the woman. Or the woman for the man. While she's a lily among brambles.

Like here's a tree among the forest. Sort of a similar idea. Similar feelings. But expressed in different ways. And we see them carrying different roles. There's a lot of passion in the practicalities.

And she describes a lot of the practical details of marriage in this passage. When she says that their couch is green. Or better that their bed is verdant. And she's saying that there's cedar and pine holding up their house.

[10:13] She's not saying that they enjoy spending time together outside. As some commentators think. She's thinking about fertility. And how she'd love for their family to grow. How she'd love for them to have children.

She's thinking about their relationship as a solidly built house. Long lasting. In verse 3. She sees him as an apple tree. That gives her shade.

And provides sweet apples. She's talking about how he protects her. And provides for her. As she thinks of him being. Of being with him in the banqueting house.

Or literally the house of wine. In verse 4. She's sitting under his tribal or his military banner. It's a picture of how she's submitting to him. It's a really beautiful and poetic way of saying what Paul would later say in Ephesians 5.

Wives submit to your husbands. Husbands love your wives. But it is really worth noting that she doesn't first sing a great song about how delightful and gorgeous he is.

[11:17] And then just make a list. And I'd like for us to raise children together. And I'd like to be together for a long time. And I'd like for him to protect me. And to provide for me. And I want to submit to him.

No, no. She is singing about all of that too. The whole thing together as a package is worth singing about. And it's largely because he takes responsibility to make it worth singing about.

He makes sure that he's the kind of person that she would want to live with. When he protects and provides. He makes sure that what he provides is sweet and beautiful.

And what it looks like for a husband to provide and to protect. Will be different for each couple.

There will be different needs and different gifts and different talents. But however he protects and provides.

The way he does it makes her want to sing. And the reason it's such a joy for her to submit to him. To sit under his tribal banner. Is because his banner over her is love.

[12:19] Husbands and fiancés and all potential husbands. What banner do you want to fly over your families? Is it control? Is it popularity?

Is it success? Or is it love? For those who know you and your family best. Could they look at you and say, There goes a husband and a father.

Whose banner over them is love. A man who protects and provides and loves. So we've gone to the gallery. And we've seen that this is it.

This is what God designed. It is a beautiful, holistic, robust picture. It's rich and beautiful through and through. But of course we can't all live in art galleries.

So we need to spend some time at the battlefield. To learn and acknowledge that this is not always it. So at the battlefield we learn this is not always it.

[13:19] This beautiful picture shows the design for love and marriage. And yet there is a sense in which this picture is out of reach.

In different ways for each and every one of us here. But out of reach nonetheless. It's an area of our lives that is a battlefield one way or the other.

For some this is out of reach. Because while you think God hasn't particularly given you a gift for singleness. That is where you find yourself. And it's been a long time of waiting.

Maybe for some of you. You don't even feel particularly capable of wanting this. When you think of love and romance. You find yourself tempted to desire things that God has forbidden.

Or even though you are attracted to this vision of marriage. You're still feeling tempted to seek pleasure and fulfillment elsewhere while you wait. For some of us it feels out of reach because we see it in the past.

[14 : 24] Through the pain of bereavement or the tragedy of divorce. And it can be a battlefield for those who are married. That may be facing the difficulty of not seeing the family grow as you'd wish. With maybe the pain of infertility and loss of children. Or maybe just simply the days when it just feels like a bit of a fight. To keep those beams and rafters up.

To keep them in place and to keep loving each other each day. Sadly for others it is much worse than that. Where instead of a place of happiness and delight.

And provision and protection. The home has become the danger to be protected from. The Office of National Statistics. Reported that between March of 2016 and March of 2017.

In England and Wales. About 1.9 million people. Aged between 16 and 59. Experienced some kind of domestic abuse. About two thirds women. About one third men.

[15 : 25] So it is worth noting. If anyone here is going through that. Please do seek help. From the police. From the elders here. From trusted friends.

If you're the person being reached out to. Do believe what your friend is telling you. There's a whole range here isn't there. Of ways in which this picture is out of our reach.

Ever since Genesis 3. This is out of our reach. And maybe can touch a more nerve. And actually in the passage. We see the woman facing something of a struggle. Herself in verse 5.

She says she's sick with love. Now we might assume that this means. That she just swoons at the sight of him. But in the ancient world. To be sick with love. Was always to do with someone being absent.

Not present. She's sick with love. Because he's not there. She misses him. Like crazy. This section of the book. Is likely describing the time. Before they get married. With them getting married at the beginning of chapter 4.

[16 : 27] And so the Christian Standard Bible. It's a recently revamped translation. Which I think does a really good job. With this passage. In places like verse 6 for example. It says.

May his left hand be under my head. And his right arm embrace me. Which I think is a better way of seeing it. He's away at the moment. And she's waiting. And so here she's turning to her friends. To help her get through it. To sustain her with raisins. And refresh her with apples. Waiting for him is really hard for her. So she turns to friends for help. I think that shows us the importance of not facing the battle.

Whatever the battle is for you alone. Whatever particular pains and struggles are. We don't need to face them alone. Just as she turns to her friends. We needn't pretend like our lives are all completely peachy.

And we can and we should. Look to one another for help. And for sustenance. And refreshment. And there's obviously an appropriate level of discretion.

[17 : 29] In how we talk about this area of our lives. But it is a significant part of our lives. That is public. And worth being open about. And seeking the support of friends for. And for living wisely.

In our different particular circumstances. And if we look back at this beautiful picture. Even for those that are happily married. There isn't always this sense of excitement.

Is there? And as C.S. Lewis points out in Mere Christianity. It doesn't really make sense. To want it to be like this all the time. He says this. If the old fairy tale ending.

They lived happily ever after. Is taken to mean. They felt for the next 50 years. Exactly as they felt the day before they were married. Then it says. What probably never was.

Or never would be. True. And it would be highly undesirable. If it were. Who could bear to live. In that excitement. For even five years. What would become of your work.

[18 : 28] Your appetite. Your sleep. Your friendships. So if this is something. Beyond all of us. One way or another. And not even realistic.

Or desirable. For our whole lives. Then surely there must be something more to this song. And so we've got two more places to visit. To figure out what's going on here.

Next place is the gym. Where we learn that this is not it. The gym where we learn that this is not it. When you go to the gym. Each exercise or each piece of equipment. Will be more or less similar.

To activities that you do in real life. Work with it. So on one end. You can get a step machine. Which is like climbing steps. And the movement there. Involves very much the same as climbing steps.

Or if you get an erg or a rowing machine. What you do on that.

[19 : 27] Is very similar to what you do when you're rowing. And yet on the other end. You've got weight machines. That get you moving and lifting. In ways that you would never move and lift. In

normal life. And yet they're useful.

Just to keep you generally fit and healthy. But also just to strengthen. All kinds of bits of you. That will be useful in everyday life. And the sum of songs is actually like.

Both of those ends. At the same time. So on the one hand. You can glean all it has to say specifically. About love and marriage. And there is a lot to learn there.

And on the other hand. As commentator. And my former professor actually. Ian Duggett. He points out. At its core. This is a book that's all about. About desire. It's a book about desire.

It doesn't matter. When you first. Said the words. I want. Or however you say it. In your mother tongue. You have been expressing the fact. That you want. For even longer.

[20 : 26] Than you've been able to speak. The youngest baby. May not be able to articulate. What he or she wants. But they can make it pretty clear. That they want something.

Can't they? That we find ourselves. Find in ourselves. A capacity for wanting. And think about how much wanting you do each day.

How often do you think. Or say. I want. On any given day. That we are just non-stop. Wanters. Aren't we? So it makes sense.

That we should. Have a book. That gives us wisdom. How to handle this. This feature. This capacity. To desire. So more fundamentally.

Than being a love song. The song of songs. Is a guide. To wise wanting. And where better. To give us a clear. Lesson. In wise wanting. Than in the area. Of our earthly lives.

[21 : 21] Where we want. Most strongly. And desire. Most deeply. So what does the passage. Teach us about that? Well first of all. Simply from seeing.

How this delight. And desire. And pleasure. Is so joyously celebrated. That we can see that. Desire is a good thing. It is God who made us.

To be wanters. Our ability to want. Was his idea. From the beginning. Now not everyone. Believes this. Buddhism for example. Is all about.

Disagreeing. With this. Idea. Buddhism has. Four noble truths. The first noble truth. Everything. Suffers. The second noble truth.

The cause of suffering. Is desire. Third noble truth. Of Buddhism. To stop suffering. Stop desiring. Fourth noble truth.

[22 : 17] Follow the eightfold path. To learn. To stop suffering. Ellis Potter. Who. Is a former. Buddhist monk. Who came to faith. Through the ministry. Of Francis Schaeffer. He gives this.

As an example. Of how this all works out. If I have a toothache. And I desire. That the pain will stop. And it does not stop. I suffer. But if I have.

A toothache. And I do not desire. That the pain will stop. And it does not stop. I do not suffer. I am free. You see. The pain is there. But if I realize. That I have the pain.

I don't suffer. My experience is not. I have pain. But pain is. But the truth is that. God made us to be. Wanters. And it is possible. For us to desire. Good things. And to enjoy. Good things. That is a wonderful gift. From God. If you know.

[23 : 13] The Torah. Theopatechism. That the chief end. Is to. Glorify. And. Enjoy him. But verse 7. I think. Is a really key verse. Where.

The woman here. Gives us. Some particular exaltations. About some wise. Wanting. So verse 7. So note. First of all. She adjures them. By the gazelles.

Or the does. Of the field. What on earth. Is that about. What can you learn. About wanting. From that. What does she mean. Is she just being a bit.

Flowery. And poetic. Well she is obviously being. Flowery and poetic. And these are animals. That are used throughout. Licked to images. Or romance.

And love. But there is something. More going on here. It's a bit of poetic. Word play. The word. For gazelles. In Hebrew. Is. Savot. Which.

[24 : 07] Sounds a bit like. Savot. That means. Armies. Or hosts. Some people use the phrase. In English. The Lord. Savot. That's what it is. The Lord of armies.

Or the Lord of hosts. And. The phrase. Do's of the fields. Aliot. Hasadeh. Sounds a bit like. El Shaddai. They are both poetic ways.

Of alluding to the Lord. To Yahweh. Whose idea. Was romance. And love. And marriage. And sexuality. It was Yahweh.

Sabah. Ot. It was. The Lord of hosts. It was. El Shaddai. Lord Almighty. Which means. That he is the Lord. And master. Over all of our desires.

Our desires. Are not our master. Our desires. Don't define us. That what we want. Is not the most important thing. In the world.

[25 : 02] The whole realm. Of love. And marriage. And sexuality. And the whole area. Of our wanting. More generally. Is to be humbly submitted.

To the Lord. That means. That we can sin against God. In the way we want. That we can sin against him. In what we want. Or we can.

We can put our desires. Above him. Or desire what he's forbidden. If you want to be married. That's a good thing. But that desire.

Is not to be your God. That's not to be your master. It's to be desired. Under the lordship. Of the Lord of hosts. Do you want a nice job. Maybe. That is a good thing.

But it is a desire. To be held. In submission. To God Almighty. Do you desire. Sexual gratification. Outside of marriage. Or sexual relationship.

[25 : 59] With someone of the same sex. Then. They are desires. To be confessed. As sin. We submit those desires. To the Lord. By repenting from them. By turning away from them.

And that means. That if they're desires. To be confessed. And repented of. That does mean. That they are desires. That can be forgiven. But we are not. To mishandle. Our capacity.

For wanting. We shouldn't abuse. Our God's given ability. To want. To be continued. Then if you look. At the end of verse 7. She specifically. Exhorts.

Them. Not to stir up. Or awaken love. Until it pleases. Not until you please. Until you want. But until it pleases.

Or until it is fitting. We don't let our desires. Take the driving seat. With God's help. We are to keep them. Under control. And we should acknowledge.

[26 : 56] That as good. And fantastic a thing. As the desire. And delights. Of romantic love. Are. As well as all kinds. Of good things. That we can have. Here on earth. There is a time.

And a place. For each thing. The fact that sexual love. Is beautiful. And joyous. Doesn't mean. That you let it control. It means that you keep it. In its rightful place.

Within the bond of marriage. Where God has created it for. And so she's not saying here. Never ever want this. She's saying. Be wise and obedient. In how you want it.

Want it in the context. Of the fear of the Lord. Which is of course. Where wisdom begins. So when you find yourself. Wanting something. Whether that is. A sexual desire.

Or financial. Or you want power. Or popularity. Or a nicer house. Or better toys. Or more books. Or whatever it is. We are called here to ask.

[27 : 54] Am I wanting. Wisely. Am I confessing to God. The times when I desire. Sinful things. Am I acknowledging. That God made this capacity.

For wanting. That I have. And that I should use it. For his glory. Is what I want. A good thing. Am I wanting good things.

Wisely. Am I trusting God. To be wiser than I. In deciding. Whether I get it or not. Are there all kinds of questions. That wise wanters.

Should ask. It's worth thinking of. What those questions. Might be. So maybe that can be your homework. Or your lunchtime conversation starter. What questions. Do wise wanters.

Ask. Ask. Well that's the lesson we learn. At the gym. This is. About more. About more than just love. And marriage. This is about wise wanting.

[28 : 52] But it's. If it's more about more than that. Then it is more about that. In another way as well. So for this fourth lesson. We need to go to the temple. To see that this.

Is it. So what is it. When we go to the temple. To learn this lesson. Well as I mentioned. If you look at. Chapter one. Verse one. This is the song.

Of songs. Means. This is the greatest song. Of them all. Just like. The holy of holies. Is the holiest place. The song of songs.

Is the best song. In the world. And. Not even the best. Purest. Most passionate. Marriage. In the world. Is worthy.

Of the best. Of all songs. The only love. Worthy. Of the song. Of songs. Is the love. To which the song. Together with all of the bible.

[29 : 46] Ultimately. Points us. It's giving us a glimpse. Of how God. Loves us. And specifically. How Christ. Loves his church. This song.

Points us. To a God. Who loves us. Deeply. And movingly. We see a God. Who wants to enter. A deep. Intimate. Relationship.

With his people. We rightly. See ourselves. Or should see ourselves. As just a wildflower. Of Sharon. With all of our sin. And all of our disordered desires.

With nothing special. And yet. He chooses. Amazingly. To see us. As a lily. Among brambles. And he. Makes us. The love. Of his life.

As I was saying earlier. About how we've broken up. The idea of marriage. We've done at least as much. To dismantle the. The bible idea. Of covenant.

[30 : 42] It's a word that. That's used to describe. Our relationship. With God. Covenant. Just sounds like. Sort of a stodgy. Theological. Technical term. Doesn't it? We've made it into a bit.

Of a Malcolm Rifkind word. And maybe you're here. This morning. And maybe you're not a Christian. And all this. Sounds pretty foreign to you. Pretty foreign experience. But well.

Maybe this is what. You thought it was all about. Just a sort of a stodgy. Uptight relationship. Where I keep the rules. And he sort of reluctantly. Let's me in. Maybe you've even understood.

That the good news of Jesus. Is all about him. Offering us salvation. But maybe you've thought. That he just sort of. Does it reluctantly. He does his bit.

He does his duty. And then he goes off. To be where he really wants to be. But just as we saw earlier. That biblical marriage. Embraces both. That the passion. And the practicalities.

[31 : 36] Together as a whole. And also as things to be celebrated. And delighted in. So also. Our covenant with him. Is an intimate. Loving relationship.

And it's to be celebrated. Jesus wants to be with his people. He wants to gaze into our eyes. He loves us. Deeply.

It's not just words either. By the power of his spirit. He wants to grow this family. As he adds more and more people. To the church. And as he builds the house.

His temple. His church. And he ensures that it will last forever. Jesus protects us. And provides for us. Ultimately.

He protects us from the evil one. Breaking our chains. As he cried out from the cross. It is finished. Jesus provided.

[32 : 33] The means of being brought back. To God. And he provides us all. With resurrection life. He brings us to the banqueting house. To feed us bread and wine.

And he lovingly subdues us to himself. And his banner over us. Is love. That is what it really means. For him to enter into covenant.

With us. It's what it means to be a Christian. The Bible's covenant history. As boring as that might sound. It's essentially. It's a love story.

It's the greatest love story. Ever told. Celebrated by the greatest. Of all the songs. And we help each other.

As we wait for his return. We are to refresh. And sustain each other. As we wait. And actually. Because of our different situations. If we are wise wanters.

[33 : 32] We can actually help each other. Learn something. About how to wait. As we wait together. Just some examples. If you're married. For example. You can point us to the joy of knowing Christ.

And the eternal joy. Of which your marriage. And this song. Is really just a whisper. If you're single. And you're happy with it.

This morning. You can show us. How Christ. Not any earthly spouse. Ultimately. Is the greatest joy. Of our hearts. If you're single.

And yet. Hoping. And longing for marriage. As you want. Wisely. You can learn yourself. And also teach your brothers and sisters. So much.

About. More importantly. To wait on the Lord. To wait for his return. Those of you facing all kinds of trials. And losses. As you look to Christ.

[34 : 28] As you find comfort in him. And hope in him. As you see this song. As a song. That is still yours. With Christ. Christ.

Whatever your circumstances. However weakly. You feel you might be doing it. You really are teaching. Your brothers and sisters. That to know him. Is better. Those of you dealing with.

With temptations. To want wrongly. As you find joy. And love. In Christ. You will show your brothers and sisters. How he is better. Than any earthly pleasure.

And you can model perseverance. And joy. In his grace. For you. And there is all kinds of things. That we can learn. About this song. And about Christ.

From our different perspectives. And standpoints. And we can refresh. And sustain each other. In that way. As we wait for Christ. Together. Whatever our different circumstances.

[35 : 27] Let's praise God. Together. Let's wait for him. Together. Together. With each other's help. Let's sing together.

His forever. His alone. Who the Lord from me. Shall part. With what joy. And peace. Unknown. Christ can fill. The longing heart.

Heaven and earth. May fade. And flee. First born light. In gloom decline. But while God and I. Shall be. I am his. And he is mine.

That is our song. I am his. He is mine. Martin Luther actually said. That is. That will be his one verse. To explain. Union with Christ. I am his.

He is mine. Let's praise God. For such a privilege. Thank you.