

The Concert

7.1 – 8.14

(Studies Eleven—Fourteen)

Study Eleven

Symphony of Married Love (7.1-10)

I. READY?

The Questions (for personal study, or group use)

1. In clusters of three, compare and contrast this passage with the “honeymoon passage” of 4.1-7.
2. How has the conflict and its resolution prepared them for chapter seven?
3. How should a follower of Jesus understand and treat his/her own body? What is the Scriptural understanding of bodies, and how have Christians often misunderstood this?
Are spirits and souls and minds more important than bodies? (Compare the “one flesh” of Genesis 2.24!)
4. What is the purpose of sex in marriage?
5. In reflecting on these ten verses, what can you learn about godly lovemaking?
6. How can we guide our children toward a healthy view of marital sex, and away from the abuse and misuse of this gift? How can this gift be abused even within marriage?
7. What is Solomon’s wife saying in 7.10, and how does this relate to 2.16 and 6.3?

The Quest (for more understanding)

1. Let’s polish our correspondence skills again! As a male, write a one-page response to a friend who says, “My buddies at school are putting a lot of pressure on me, saying that I am not a man unless...”
2. As a female, please respond to a good friend who says to you, “He is putting a lot of pressure on me, saying that I do not really love him unless ...”
3. In your discussion group (or class or conference setting), share 2 - 3 letters from each gender, and then affirm and critique them.

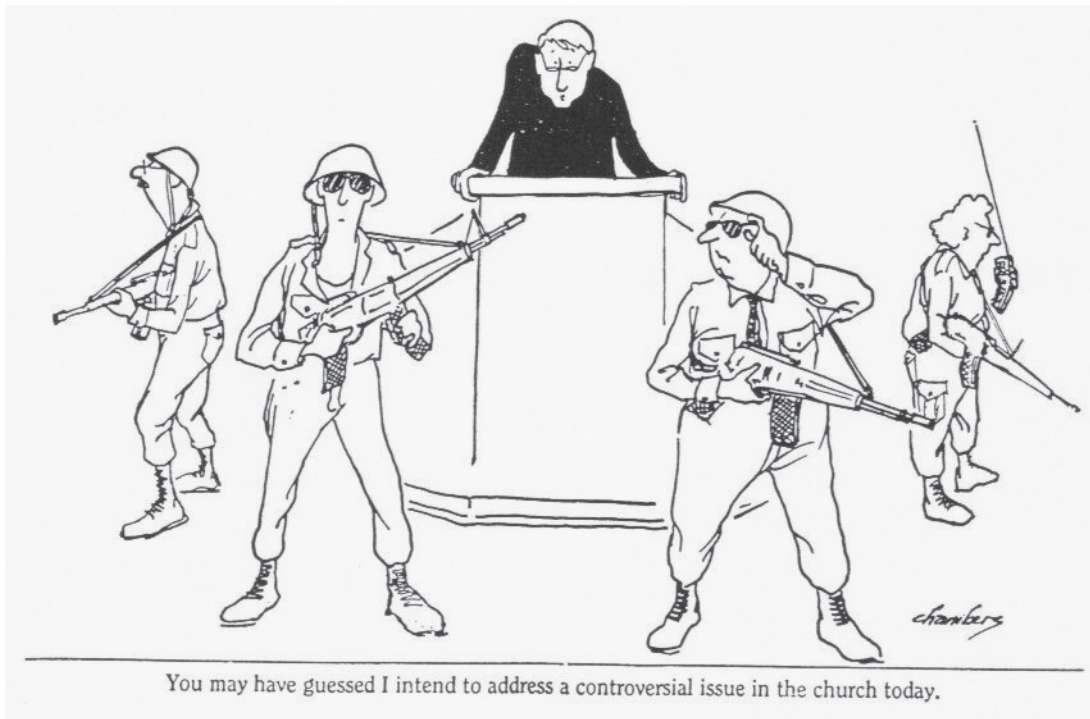
II. REFLECTION

Several years ago I was campus pastor with InterVarsity at UCLA in Southern California. The students had invited a well-known guest speaker, and decided to advertise his message on relationships by putting posters on every available tree and wall on campus. Each poster had a huge S-E-X, with the small print underneath, "Now that we have your attention..." As I remember, the signs attracted quite an audience.

Sex will get our attention, almost any time. And the ten verses which are the focus today are among the best sex passages in all of world literature! We'd like to share a handful of hints, five ideas that can translate into great sex. They are like five movements in a grand symphony!

1. Great sex is strategic. What in the world does that mean? Raquel Welch, an actress not really noted as a theologian, commented once, "The most important sex organ that we possess is our mind." She was right. Thinking sex separates us from the animals. Sex is not an instinct or an urge that we are helpless to control. Someone has observed that in the Genesis creation account, God made mankind as the only creature who would experience sex face to face in a relationship. Animals do not have conversations or eye contact while they are "doing it".

The Song brings this out beautifully. There is no sexual intercourse within courtship, or within conflict. In fact, the exciting announcements in 3.6 and 6.10: "Who is this..." herald the end of courtship and of conflict, and the beginning of sex within a committed and then a restored relationship in chapters 4 and 7. Working toward marriage in the first three chapters, and working within it in chapters five and six (the third section) can prepare us for great sex in the second and fourth parts of the song. A wise mind says, "We will not practice sex in courtship because it will steal from marriage promises, and we will not practice sex in conflict because it will not solve marriage problems."



Good strategy also says that their focus on being life partners again, helped by her daydreaming thoughts in chapter 5 and his delightful words in chapter 6, prepare both to be sex partners again in chapter 7. I remember a colleague sharing at a staff conference years ago that he would kiss his wife Susie goodbye in the morning, and whisper in her ear, “How about tonight?” It gave her something to think about all day...

2. Great sex is a servant. The epidemic of AIDS, especially troublesome in southern Africa, can be traced at least in part to men convincing themselves and one another that sex is something they cannot control. They simply “must have it”: when their wives are not able to respond for a week or so each month, or lots longer after childbirth, when women are so available (especially at the truck stops), and when myths convince them that younger is better and virgins are best.

When are we going to grow some godly men, in Africa and around the world, who covet the spiritual fruit of self-control?

On both sides of the Atlantic it is too easy and tempting to say far more with our bodies than our hearts are prepared to say. I am convinced that deep physical involvement before the wedding at the expense of exploring the relational world of ideas and memories and dreams has not equipped young people very well for the long journey of marriage. When you let an elephant into the sitting room, it is hard to focus on the books on the coffee table or on the great painting on the wall. Sex is a great servant, but a lousy master...

3. Great sex is sensual. First of all, let’s talk about bodies. Most of us as believers have a very mixed up relationship with our bodies. We pamper them each morning, obsess in the mirror over having a little too much of this and not quite enough of that, and make sure that the food and diet and exercise industries all stay solvent. Then we turn right around and adopt a “Greek view” that views our body like a tent, a snakeskin that we will shed someday.

God likes bodies! At the start of history he created Adam and Eve with bodies, both very similar and very different. And he instructed them to “become one flesh”, not one mind or one heart or one spirit! At the centre of history Christmas says that Emmanuel started life as one cell and experienced all the stages of our bodily journey. After the resurrection God could have transitioned into the spirit world but no, his risen Son had five scars, could be seen and heard and touched, and enjoyed a fish breakfast by the Galilee lakeside. And at the end of history God’s intentions are clear: He wants to be surrounded by bodies in a new heavenly earth.

So the king and his queen admire and enjoy each other’s bodies. As she is dressed in transparent veils and dances seductively before him (see the dance of the angels at Mahanaim, Genesis 32.1-2) Solomon catalogues for the third time what he sees as he reclines on the royal cushions. The dance was a very common one performed on the wedding night, so it would seem they are “getting a fresh start”.

I am reminded of Tim LaHaye’s counsel to newlyweds on their first night together. He recommends a bubble bath, with candles, and a wife slipping into the water first. Then he suggests that the husband join her and follow the exploring model presented by Solomon. The king’s counsel in Proverbs 5.18-19 is also good for wedding nights and most other nights.

Appreciation for our partner's body is heightened when we employ all five senses. In a Christian culture saturated by words and a secular environment full of visuals, the Song is so good at also adding smell and taste and touch! Notice the fragrance of apples, the taste of wine, and the touch of both dates and grapes. The Song explodes with five-fold sensual language.

4. Great sex is slow. Solomon is not in a hurry, and in ten-fold observation he affirms her from her sandaled feet upwards to her hair. Even that indicates an advance in their relationship. In his culture, as in most African cultures, there is a casual freedom about female bodies above the waist, but a guardedness and privacy below the waist.

I remember seeing, after our first six weeks in Zambia in 1974, a young mother walking on busy Cairo Road with her baby twins. Both got hungry at the same time. No problem: the mother was equipped for just such an occasion. (I resisted the tourist urge to capture this Kodak moment...) At the same time, I recall girls at our student conferences carefully wrapping their chitenge skirts around their ankles when they sat.

Solomon is very comfortable and very candid. His actual language, in verse 3 for instance has not made it past the censors (for crossword puzzle addicts, what is a five letter word starting with v...?) Yes, he describes her genitals, and then her tummy, which he likens to a softly mounded wheat "pillow". He starts by describing what he sees, and then moves on to both delight and desire, and spells out what he intends to do.

An Ethiopian student of ours caught the dynamics of this very well when she observed, "Men are often like a bush fire, but women are like a charcoal fire." It does take a lot longer to warm up that charcoal, but the glow afterwards also lasts a lot longer. Most men seem not to realize that 10 - 20 minutes of cuddling and conversation after sex can be an amazing gift to their wives.

5. Great sex is satisfying. Sex is God's idea of a good time, designed for one man and one woman in marriage to enjoy for one lifetime. If that simple formula were practiced, AIDS would be finished in one generation!!

It is noteworthy that in Genesis 1-2, where the sexual union was first introduced, and in Solomon's Song where it was frequently practiced, there is no mention of children at all. Marriage seems to take precedence over family and, although a healthy couple will welcome and love and train God's gift of children, their marriage is still complete without them.

At the risk of offending our alliteration agnostics, a marital friendship is primarily for partnership and passion and pleasure, and secondarily for procreation and pregnancy and parenting. It is surprising that in the 39 books written before Christmas, which focus on the bearing of a male child (who might be that coming Messiah), this Song contains not a hint of genealogy. In a conversation reported between Pope John XXIII and Louis Armstrong, the pope asked the famous musician if he had any children. "No, your Excellency," Louis is supposed to have said, "but my wife and I are having a lot of fun trying!" And let's bring in the other Lewis as well, C.S. Lewis, who made the remarkable observation that there should be far more laughter in Christian bedrooms!

The give-and-take of verses 6-9 is a delight. A very likely reading of the ninth verse has her saying, "May our celebration satisfy my lover, and flow smoothly over the lips of sleepers." It seems they have fallen asleep in each other's arms. In the tenth verse her comment, "I belong to my lover, and his desire is for me," completes the journey of three verses with this comment, and affirms her complete contentment.

This satisfying and enjoyable and often rather costly (it costs lots of time and restraint) sex needs to be offered as an alternative to a culture saturated by cheap sex, a culture saturated by "a law of diminishing returns". This law suggests that the more sex we experience outside of personal commitment and public ceremony, the less satisfying it will be.

A friend mentioned to me several weeks ago the downward spiral, the sucking whirlpool that he had observed in contemporary sexual practice. He said, "If we seek satisfaction outside of God's design, we will start experimenting with adultery or pornography, move on to promiscuity or prostitution, move on further to same-sex experiments, then descend to sex with animals, and finally hit bottom with necrophilia: sex with the dead." Romans 1.18-32 pictures graphically what happens when God "gave them up", when He takes the handbrakes off.

That same God invites us to reflect on and respond to the 7.1-10 passage again, and promises that this great sex, like a great cheese or wine, will only get better with age. Let's close with a symphony image. If two different instruments are tuned to the same fork, they are automatically tuned to each other!



III. RESOURCES

- A. Two discovery sheets, made available courtesy of David and Janet Cunningham of *Family Impact*, Bulawayo, Zimbabwe.
- B. Tim Stafford "Getting Serious about Lust in an Age of Smirks" in *Christianity Today*, 10 January 1994.

Enjoy Your Marriage

Couple's Discovery Time

The Art of Lovemaking

Married couples can try to hide their true feelings about sex from each other. This discovery sheet will only help to build sexual harmony between you if you are totally honest in your answers.

1. My beliefs about sexual intimacy in marriage include:

	Yes	No	Not sure
Intimate sexual pleasure is one of life's beautiful experiences.			
Both husbands and wives should experience sexual fulfillment.			
It is not right for a Christian to enjoy sexual pleasure.			
The husband should always initiate sex.			
My religious beliefs affect my attitude to sex.			
Television and films affect my opinions about sex.			
It is more important to give sexual pleasure than to receive it.			
Men enjoy sex more than women.			

2. My feelings about sex in marriage include:

- a. When we were first married sex was...
- b. When I am aroused I feel...
- c. I think sexual intimacy is...
- d. The worst thing about me as a sexual partner is...
- e. The best thing about me as a sexual partner is...

3. My dreams about sex include:

- Making love more often/less often
- Finding more creative ways to express sexual intimacy
- More variety
- More information
- Getting help for sexual problems
- Greater freedom to say what gives me pleasure

Enjoy Your Marriage

Couple's Discovery Time: Deeper in Love

The giving and receiving of sexual pleasure is a mystery. You and your partner are a unique combination. It is important for you to share the when, how and what of what turns you on. Good communication is essential for good sex. Complete the following.

1. Showing an interest and building desire:
 - a. I think of sexual intimacy when _____
 - b. I have a much stronger desire for sex when _____
 - c. I cannot respond to your sexual advances if _____

2. Making love is more natural when:
 - a. We have been close all day Yes _____ No _____
 - b. When you slip into bed and _____
 - c. I feel loved as a whole person and I am free to _____

3. I enjoy sexual arousal when: _____
 - a. We take the time to _____
 - b. You say _____
 - c. These other areas of life together are happy _____

4. When we are giving to each other sexually I feel _____

5. During times of intimacy I wish you would _____

6. For me the sensation of sexual release is like _____

7. The 'afterglow' feeling is like _____

8. After we make love, I would like you to _____

Getting Serious About LUST in an Age of Smirks

TIM STAFFORD

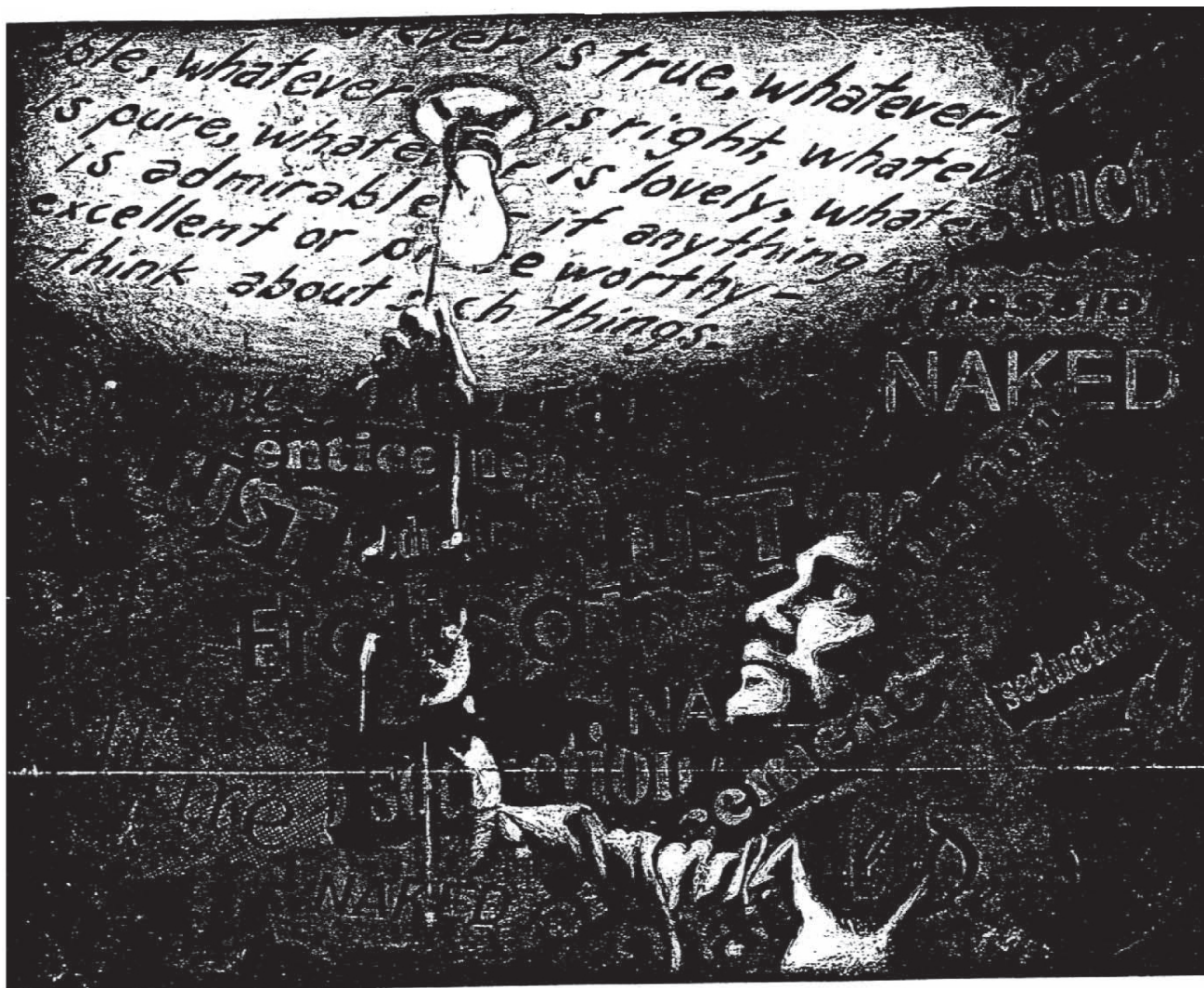
Lust is hard to speak about seriously in our era. When Jimmy Carter, running for President, told an interviewer that he had often committed adultery in his heart, the reaction in the press was what John Updike described as "nervous hilarity." "How strangely on modern ears," continues Updike, "falls the notion that lust—sexual desire that wells up in us as involuntarily as saliva—in itself is wicked!"

Our modern way of handling lust is to pretend that it has no hold on us—to see it as inevitable and healthy, even fun. Is it really so? We don't have to look hard to see that lust is not nearly as frivolous as our society would like to believe.

In the first place, we don't experience it as frivolous. Let even the most mature adults get tangled in the foolishness of lust—channel-surfing for TV sex in a motel room or plotting the next meeting with someone they want to devour mentally—and they find themselves in a helpless, robotic daze. They may try to joke about it, but the light-heartedness is an act. Lust may be thrilling—like an encounter with a shark is thrilling—but it is not a laugh.

Our society is not finding lust such a laugh, either. While it is hard to trace a direct connection between *Playboy* and modern social disintegration, our infatuation with lust surely has something to do with the spread of AIDS, teenage pregnancy, and divorce.

The Bible treats lust as deadly serious. Our Lord says that lust is tantamount to adultery. For Christians, that should settle it. But it is not only because of Scripture that we take lust seriously. Scripture is underlined by experience.



What lust is

I have spent much of the past 20 years talking and writing about sex, and I know from experience that a contingent of Christian parents and pastors would rather never mention it. When they speak of battling lust, they really mean eliminating all thoughts of sex. Essentially, they would rather teenagers never enter puberty.

The Bible, however, is frank and un-squeamish about sex. Sex is not really that big a topic in Scripture, and the Bible's concern with lust is only partly about sexual lust. In English, the word *lust* generally connotes lurid sexual fantasies. It is closely associated with the mental pictures of naked bodies to which males are so typically drawn.

This English meaning of *lust*, however, has no equivalent word in New Testament Greek. The word translated *lust* in Matthew 5:28 (*epithumia*) means

simply *desire*. On occasion, the word, in fact, has a positive meaning, as when Jesus tells his disciples that he has "desired with desire" (as the King James puts it) to eat the Passover meal with them (Luke 22:15). Clearly, Jesus does not mean that he has fantasized about the Passover meal, mentally drooling over the menu. *Epithumia* is not a sensual fantasy. Jesus means that he has deeply longed for the occasion.

The same Greek word is used to render the Hebrew word translated *covet*, as in, "You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor" (Exod. 20:17, NIV). Here we strike at the heart of the problem of lust, as the Bible conceives it: We want things that don't belong to us. Leave sex out of it entirely, for the moment. We are not content with what we have. We want something

more—and that desire drives us.

Lust, or covetousness, is a basic component of what the Bible calls sin. All two-year-olds, and all truthful forty-year-olds, confess it: I want what I want because I want it. Nobody and nothing else figures. Jesus' comments on sexual lust fit into that. Lust shows that, in your heart of hearts, you want somebody else's sexual life. When a man lusts for a woman, he is not grateful for what God has given him. He is making himself sick thinking about what he wishes God would give him.

The psychology of lust is a simple process: It begins with attraction; it turns quickly to dissatisfaction; it results in fixation. It leaves us ungrateful, discontented, and obsessive. When you are filled with lust—for it does indeed seem to fill you—you can have nothing in your mind but that appetite for what you lack. This is true not just of sex.

The "flesh"—that is, our lives without God—urgently desires many things. It wants power. It wants pleasure. It wants wealth. It wants status and admiration. None of these is wrong in itself. And nothing would be wrong with liking these things. But desire, or lust, is more than liking. It is the will to possess. Lust turns good things into objects of worship.

And that is why lust, or covetousness, is so closely linked to another biblical word: *idolatry*. What we lust for, we worship. We may joke about our lusts, but our behavior shows a more fundamental allegiance. We look to our idols to give us what we need—to make our lives rich and purposeful. In our culture, an idol many people look to is the god of sexual fulfillment.

The right to desire

Look at the magazine covers in the grocery-store check-out line, and you will be reminded of how crazy the biblical view sounds to modern people. The ordinary North American takes it as a given that people want things that are not theirs. Naturally a man envies his neighbor's new car. Of course a woman looks at Paul Newman and thinks how good he would be in bed. What is wrong with wanting it—so long as you don't commit a crime to get it?

In fact, we have come perilously close to embracing lust as a fundamental human characteristic—if not a right. Most discussion of homosexuality assumes this: people have a deep, helpless sexual desire for a certain kind of partner, they argue; therefore, it would be cruel and inhuman to deny them the freedom to fulfill that desire.

And deep, helpless desires are not confined to homosexuality. Nearly all desire seems deep and uncontrollable. I am not aware of choosing to desire what I desire. The Bible may tell me not to covet my neighbor's wife or house, but I don't seem to have a choice about it. I see it; I want it. I can take a cold shower, avert my eyes, avoid a second glance, even undergo psychotherapy—but in a world full of beautiful things, my desires cannot be done away with easily. They keep welling up.

Still, the Bible tells me, "You shall not covet." Jesus says, in the context of sexual lust, that if my eye causes me to sin, I should pluck it out (Matt. 5:29). Just because I can't help lust does not make it acceptable. Jesus is dedicated

to bringing in another kingdom. To be his disciple, I must put lust to death. I must learn to want what he wants for me and to put away everything else.

Replacing desire with desire

As a boy raised in church, I learned that lust is serious. With some encouragement from other Christians, I tried to stamp out lust in the most obvious way: through techniques of self-control. One strategy was systematically to comb my environment to remove all stimuli to lust (movies, magazines, bathing suits). Another technique was to comb my mind to root out every lustful thought (sexual images).

Anyone who has taken lust seriously can add to the list of self-control techniques. Cold showers, exercise, staying busy, scriptural mantras: all these have been tried to push lust down. Broadly speaking, they don't work. They may keep lust at bay for a time, but they certainly do not eliminate it. The human mind is so strong it can use any raw material for lusting. (Think of conservative Islam, compelled to cover even women's faces.) And trying to root out lustful thoughts can be as futile as trying not to think of pink elephants.

Interestingly enough, I found none of these techniques in the Bible. Clearly, in the New Testament, they come in second to an utterly different form of salvation.

"Since, then, you have been raised with Christ," the apostle Paul wrote the Colossians, "set your hearts on things above. . . . Set your minds on things above." Only then does he continue, "Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry" (3:1-5, NIV).

First things first: think on things above. Salvation is offered in Jesus—in his life, death, and resurrection. He forgives us for our lusts; he justifies us from our lusts; and he sends his Spirit to sanctify us from our lusts. Life in the Spirit transforms us. Self-control is a fruit of the Spirit, a result of the Spirit-filled life. Paul's promise to the Galatians is clear and optimistic, if maddeningly general: "Live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature" (Gal. 5:16, NIV).

Walk by the Spirit? Our society is dedicated to exciting lust for commercial purposes. We are bathed daily in

imaginary, electronic sexual stimulation. Against this, the Sunday-school advice to think pure thoughts seems feeble, almost naive.

Yet I believe Paul is thinking less of the moment of temptation than of the lifetime of spiritual warfare. Desires do not go away simply because we want them to. They do not generally disappear like a soap bubble when we pray. They do fade into the background, however, when a greater desire replaces them. Jesus taught us to pray for that desire: "Our Father in heaven, holy be your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done."

So the Spirit operates, planting a desire for holiness in our heart, a righteous lust that grows up and puts all other desires in the shade. A "just-say-no" strategy alone is never sufficient for the long haul. Scripture encourages us to say yes—yes to the way of the Spirit.

Having been "buried" with Christ in our baptism, we are now "made alive" with him by the Spirit. We therefore make our choices accordingly—to the point of becoming "slaves to one another" out of love (Gal. 5:13), rather than serving the self and its lusts.

When we walk by the Spirit—that is, live a full-hearted Christian life in prayer, worship, and service—we get on to better things. We apply self-control because we desire what God desires for us. We want something better, something given by God himself. We desire life in Christ and all that he gives within that life.

This is the good kind of lust. A man and woman who desire the sexual life that has been given—sex with a marriage partner—shows God's work in their lives. Desiring your spouse is good. This is part of life in the Spirit—desiring what God gives.

Life in the Spirit is a difficult walk on a narrow path. The finest, most Spirit-filled and devoted Christians struggle with misdirected desire. They may even be tempted far more powerfully than others, for an evil power is always at work. They may make progress only in the sense that evil uses stronger and subtler means to tempt them. They may "graduate" from a lust for *Playboy* to a lust for power. We do not have the techniques to eliminate sin, let alone temptation, from our lives. We will struggle with it until we see Jesus.

Yet we will see Jesus. And he is with us now—giving us greater desires. □

IV. RESPONSE

1. Which authors, of books or magazine articles, have done a good job of portraying healthy biblical sex?
2. Which movies or movie clips have you seen that portray sex in an attractive and respectful way? Or, in your opinion, should sex be written about or shown on any screen at all?
3. If you and a circle of friends were given 30 minutes of screen time and an unlimited budget, how would you put the Song of Solomon onto the movie screen (and invite your family and your pastor to the premiere showing)?

Study Twelve

Sharing of Married Love (7.11-8.4)

1. READY?

The Questions (for personal study, or group use)

1. Using “the Swedish approach to Bible study”, what can you learn from these seven verses? (Discoveries about God are marked **????** , about ourselves are marked **?** , areas that surprise or catch our attention are marked **!** , areas that confuse are marked **?** , and areas that need response from us are marked **—>**). You can add this approach to your arsenal of ways to study Scripture.
2. How do you feel about her taking the (sexual) initiative in verse 11ff?
3. What was the understanding of male and female roles in your childhood home? Were your parents content or uneasy or argumentative about their expected roles?
4. If you are married, how did you and your partner work out the assignment of daily tasks such as budgeting, household chores, choices of entertainment, and so on. How does decision-making work in your home?
5. What is the Scriptural understanding, if any, of male and female roles in marriage?
6. What do you think is the purpose, and what are the values, of a “countryside holiday”?
7. What areas of motivation does she use to win him away from all the demands of Jerusalem?

The Quest (for more understanding)

1. The Shulammitte struggles throughout with the tensions connected with intimacy and influence. She’s a lover, but the place and timing of sex is an issue. She’s also a queen, but his attachment to Jerusalem (mentioned 8 times) and hers to Lebanon (mentioned 6 times) is also an issue. Look at the data gathered below, and work with the question: what should be the healthy balance between intimacy (expectations inside the home) and influence (one or more careers outside the home)?

a. “bedroom material in the Song”

- 1.2 Yissakeni: “kiss me!”
 1.9- 2.7 and 2.8-3.5 cycles of longing, and the second is more intense
 4.1-5.1 and 7.1-10 lovemaking passages, and the second is more intense
 5.2-8 the source of the major problem in the Song!
 5.9-6.13 moving from life partner to sex partner
 7.11-8.4 note her initiative, especially in 7.13
 8.8-14 preparation, protection, and power to continue a physical relationship

b. “Throne-room” material in the Song1) His career: Jerusalem

- 1.4 and 12 ...the king...
 1.6 and 1.7 ...Made me take care of the vineyards...where you graze your flock
 2.15 and 2.16 our vineyards...he pastures his flock...
 3.1-5 she’s anxious due to his absences, connected to his career?
 3.9 and 11 the king
 3.7 and 8, 4.4 military language on his lips, never hers
 5.2 and 6 his absence, once again due to affairs of state?
 6.9 she has the approval of the court

2) Her home: Lebanon

- 1.6, 2.15 and 8.11 her world of the vineyards
 3.4 bring him home to Mom (who is also mentioned in 1.6, 6.9 and 8.2)
 3.9 and 4.8, 11 and 15 affirmation of Lebanon
 5.15 he appears like Lebanon (the trees, not the troops)
 6.11-13 compare with 7.2 a homesick young queen?
 7.4 his affirmation of Lebanon
 7.11-8.14 (and possibly 2.8-14) walks in the Lebanese countryside

2. How can a career, whether his or hers or both of theirs, help or hinder a marital relationship? How do you feel about a wife working while her husband is at home caring for the children?
3. God as Owner has entrusted to each couple the Management of money. What agreements have you reached on how money should be earned, and saved, and spent? Overall, has the stewardship of your resources been a satisfying or stressful part of your marriage?

II. REFLECTION

The small “trinity” we have referred to earlier seems to have moved her from some self-orientation in courtship (2.16), to a more servant attitude in conflict (6.3), to great security in the concert of lovemaking (7.10). The king has wooed her and won her, again, and the response on her part is emphatic: in our seven verses today she moves with new confidence and new initiative.

The Song of Solomon is unique in Scripture, not only in the role it assigns to marriage: complete and fulfilling even without children, but also in the role it assigns to the woman in marriage. She is not a doormat or a drudge or a dependent. Although in the Song Solomon is generally the responsible one and Shulamith mainly the responsive one, this passage certainly underlines a marital give-and-take that is very attractive. It is simply not true that he is the hero and she is the zero.

She says, “Let us...” three times as she proposes a holiday to her countryside home. She must have known the challenge of getting him away from the royal schedule with its non-stop meetings and appointments and emails, its insistent phone calls and overflowing in-tray...

Once again she boldly marches out seven verbs which motivate him to come. As in the courtship scene of 2.8-17 (where he also said, “Come...”, and also used seven verbs!), she is still most relaxed and most secure among the rolling hills and vineyards of her childhood home, and this is where the rest of the Song will take place.

Let’s take a look at the five-fold way she motivates her husband. Women, there is a time to take charge, and men, there is a time to respond. Let’s keep that marital friendship alive and interesting.

1. “Let us go...” she says in verse 11, inviting him away from the concrete jungle of Jerusalem, and all the demands and pressures of running an empire.

God has built rest and change of pace into His schedule for us, and Shulamith needed to remind the king of this. A holiday to her home area would be good for her, but also good for him since he needed the rest and reflection and restoration. He needed to be rescued from the urgent so that he could once again focus on the important.

God is quite at ease having created day and night, allowing us to sleep one-third of our lives away. I suspect that an American God would have been more efficient and productive than this! He also builds into each week a day of rest and reflection for mankind and servants and even animals. And he arranged for three holiday occasions each year, lasting almost a week each, so that His people could celebrate and socialize, and learn to dance and dine and drink well.

A surprising verse in Deuteronomy 24.5 hints that Shulamith’s instincts may have been more in tune with the Lord’s than her husband’s. In that text God insists that a newly-married man be freed of work and war obligations so that he could focus on his wife: “...he is free to stay at home and bring happiness to the wife he has married” (the Hebrew for “bring happiness to” means to develop skills in the art of lovemaking...) Who knows, maybe someday that verse will be found on plaques in our homes alongside that of I Corinthians 13?

2. She continues the invitation by saying, “Let us go, and see...” in verse 12, and she wants to get started first thing in the morning. She is eager to take inventory, to see if the conflict-solving scene had actually moved their marriage forward. She was clearly not content with the courtship climb toward marriage, and then settling for a fifty-year plateau...

A man was once overheard to say, “I have been happily married for twelve years... (pause) ... Hey, twelve out of thirty is not all that bad!” She desires a friendship where they can still surprise one another and learn from each other after a few decades together. What new discoveries have you made about your partner in the last year or so? In the last ten? At the end of this study a set of questions is provided from *Glamour* magazine (yes, I read them all...) designed to stimulate your relationship. A more thorough questionnaire for both husbands and wives is also available at the end of our Concert section.

It would seem that her “bait” is an experience of outdoor sex: “...there I will give you my love.” Perhaps the fastest way to a man’s heart is not always through his stomach.

3. “Let us go, and see, what’s in store...” appears to be the message of verse 13. Mandrakes are a well-known ancient aphrodisiac with its small yellow apples having a unique scent. The Arabic word for mandrake means, “the servant of love”.

His gift to her of providing complete security has triggered her initiative in proposing sex, and this particular verse almost certainly will awaken envy and longing in the male half of many marriages! The average evangelical couple, according to many surveys, experiences sexual union 2-3 times a week. But it is probably fair to say that in many relationships he is the more ready one and she the more reluctant one.

Our heroine is light years away from, “not tonight dear, I have a headache”. She has plotted and made available (“at our door”) sexual delights both familiar to him but also those creative and new and exciting. She is not into a same place, same time, same position routine, but has given thought to making this experience special. It is highly unlikely that the king would have responded, “Are you sure this can’t wait for a couple weeks? I have some important budget meetings coming up with the Syrians and the Moabites...”

A few years ago when Cathy and I taught this material in Ethiopia, one student raised his hand and asked, “Mr. Pott, does this Song have anything to say about F.G.M.?” I confessed my ignorance of the initials, and when he explained the practice of female genital mutilation common in his country, I suggested that he might see if God would answer his question in the Song of Solomon. Cathy and I have discovered since that this practice is still common in many parts of the world, is performed even into the pre-teens, and has been endorsed in Ethiopia by the church more so than by the state. About 40% of the female students in our college of about 330 had experienced this rite.

When the class saw that the girl in the Song clearly enjoys sex and clearly initiates it, they correctly saw it as an explosive discovery for their country! They also sensed that it was criminal to deprive young wives of their “pleasure centres” in order to keep them from wandering from possessive husbands. (You can see why we enjoy letting this Song speak in Africa...!)

In another African country, Portuguese-speaking Mocambique, Godfrey and Sibongile Mhlanga joined us in teaching several pastors and their wives about marriage for about three days. (The Mhlangas are on the upper left of our manual cover with us...) We discovered in our two-hour question box section that all the queries except one concerned misunderstandings about the female anatomy and cycle, and of the reproductive system and how it all works. In our evaluation afterwards, it struck us rather forcibly that African friends, and probably young people around the world, need good Christian biology to go hand in hand with good Christian theology! An excellent book is suggested in the resource section of our study.

4. In the verse which follows (8.1) she says, “Let us go and see what’s stored up in our imaginations... Let’s allow our minds to wander.” In her culture public affection between husband and wife was much discouraged, whereas it was much encouraged between brothers and sisters. This explains his frequent references to her as sister.

“Our private lovemaking is wonderful,” she says, “but I so wish I could show the world how I feel about you!” But she is part of her culture and will exercise restraint. It is a fun challenge, as a couple getting serious about each other, or as lifetime partners, to explore appropriate ways to signal affection in our own cultural setting. Perhaps a wink, an arm around our mate’s shoulder, a chaste kiss...? Ernest Hemingway was once seen coming into a crowded room, and after failing to spot his wife, said loudly, “Where is everybody?”

5. In the second verse of chapter eight she says, “Let us go home and see how I might serve you.” She is still the initiating one, wanting him to meet the mother who had trained her to be a woman, and also desiring to show him hospitality. Since she was waited on hand and foot in Jerusalem, she probably welcomed the chance to prepare refreshments. And this spilled over soon enough into the refreshment of further lovemaking... They are intoxicated with each other, which explains the spiced wine and omnipresent pomegranates.

One thing we must not miss in this passage: Shulamith is not in love with love or with lovemaking, but with Solomon. She is in love with and loyal to a specific person with all his attractions and moods, with all his memories and hopes. The emphatic “you” occurs seven times in seven verses as the object of her love.

The last couple verses (8.3-4) are an almost exact replica of 2.6-7. The king and his wife are now in a comfortable place where they can explore married sex without interruption and without hurry. His left arm provides stability and his right arm provides stimulation. (For our crossword friends, what is an eight-letter word starting with c? Yes, this Song does give occasion for blushing from time to time...)

In their book *The Love List*, which is actually much better than its title, Les and Leslie Parrott recommend that at least once a month a couple plan a memorable sexual occasion. If you have a young and active family, aren’t there older couples in each church who can baby-sit your children for a night or two, allowing you to escape non-stop touching from the little darlings, freeing you to touch each other?

The charge to the (imagined) court ladies for the third time in the fourth verse is in a puzzling place. What is it doing here after the wedding? Is it perhaps a warning against pre-marital and extra-marital sex? Or is it a reminder to all readers that sex outside of marriage is like fire outside the fireplace: it will only do damage?

Such experiences will hurt marital sex by allowing other experiences and fantasies to enter the marital bedroom. They may also hinder our ability to get to know our partner as a wonder-full person and not just a willing body. It could so easily harm our ability to expect and also to give complete trust to a lifetime partner. "Aren't you glad we waited?" she seems to say.

As it is, these two are "naked and felt no shame", and they were truly content. So was their God.

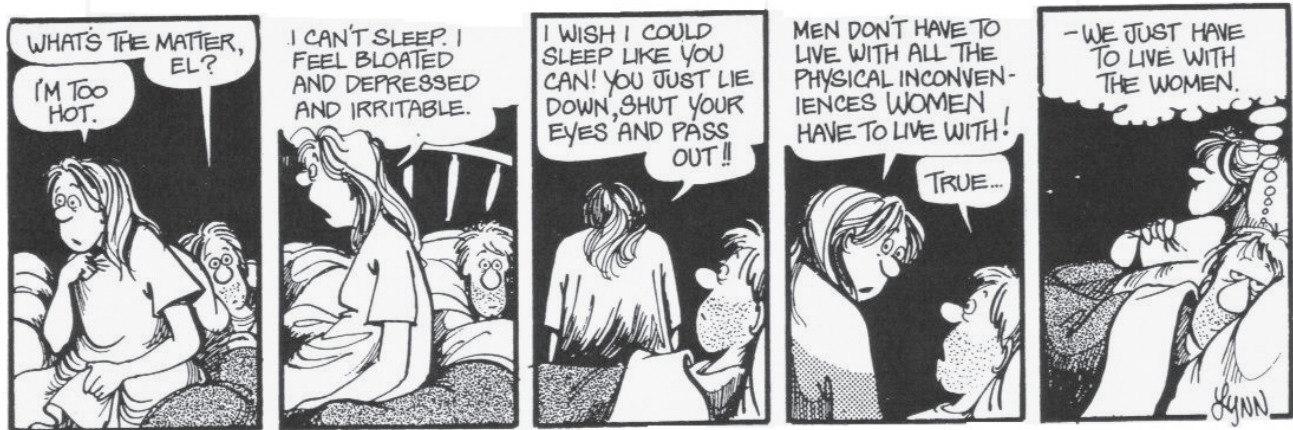
III. RESOURCES

Three women have written materials in this area that can help us.

Rinehart, Paula. *Sex and the Soul of a Woman* (2004) Grand Rapids, Michigan, Zondervan Publishing.

Trobisch, Ingrid. *The Joy of Being a Woman (and What a Man Can Do)*

Willcox, Sandy. *Cut Flowers* (2005) Ethiopia: SIM Publishing.



IV. RESPONSE

Go, sell all that you have, and then purchase *The Love List* by Les and Leslie Parrott (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2002). The authors recommend that we practice two things every day, two more every week, two more every month, and two every year. Start to put their ideas into practice and your marriage will slowly change from black-and-white to living colour...

Study Thirteen

Splendour of Married Love (8.5-7)

1. READY?

The Questions (for personal study, or group use)

1. Why does this short scene occur at this stage in the Song?
2. What seems to be the most common understanding of love in our culture, based on conversations you've had, and what you have observed in the media?
3. How would you complete the phrase "Love is..." or "Love is like..."?
4. What is the most loving friendship or marriage you have known, and how would you describe it?
5. How would you paraphrase the various pictures of 8.5-7 in your own words?
6. Which picture is the most attractive to you, and which the most confusing, and why?
7. Reflect on and discuss this statement, "Christian maturity is simply learning to be better lovers: of God Himself, of all His people, and of His creation."

The Quest (for more understanding)

1. Give everyone in the class or group a lump of play-dough and ask each one to shape something that says "love".
2. Who is the most loving person you have ever known, and what evidence would you cite for your choice?
3. Carefully see if and how each "facet of this diamond" applies to Jesus and His relationship to His church.

II. REFLECTION

It was seven months or so before our wedding, and we sat on the comfortable grass of Koinonia Conference Grounds near Santa Cruz, California. Cathy and I were hoping to get some wisdom from a crusty older staff worker, Mel Friesen.

He asked us, "So why do the two of you want to get married?" Quite honestly and eagerly I said, "God has really given us a love for each other, so we want to get married." Mel graciously did not stifle a yawn, but wondered out loud:

"Let's say, Hank, that a couple years after the wedding Cathy hurries home from an appointment, and is blind-sided by a drunk-driver. After a week in hospital a doctor informs you that your wife will live, but will be paralyzed from the neck down. Now please tell me again about this love of yours..." Mel's question has been with me for thirty-three years.

A true story is told about Dr. Robert McQuilkin, who was the president of a very influential seminary in South Carolina. At the peak of his career he handed in his resignation. Why? He said that his "I do" at his wedding meant that he was called to give primary care to his Alzheimer's-suffering wife. He casually observed that this kind of I do he had never promised to the seminary. So he chose, without applause, to care for a person who could not say thank you, and on most days did not even recognize him.

Our three verses (8.5-7) celebrate the splendour of such love, and tiptoe around its mysteries! For the third time in the Song, we are treated to the surprising announcement of "Who is this...?" The first time it closed the courtship and set the stage for the wedding and honeymoon sex (3.6), the second time it closed the conflict and set the stage for married sex (6.10), and now it sets the stage for the largest question of all: is this love strong enough to last a lifetime?

We look together at the seven facets of this splendid diamond. Or, to switch the picture, this concert is memorable enough to have us singing in the shower, humming on the way to work, and whistling in dark places.

1. Love is promising. The question in 8.5 prepares us to expect something special, especially since the earlier two uses of the same question had opened the door to something wonderful. All three questions focus on her, the first engaging our nose (the column of smoke in 3.6), the second one our eyes (dawn, moon, sun, and stars in 6.10), and now our touch in 8.5. We see her leaning on her lover, the king supporting her elbow or perhaps her waist. The girl who is comfortable to initiate is not willing to dominate, and still defers to Solomon's leadership.
2. Love is painful. Her lover responds in the difficult rest of verse 5. The apple tree is symbolic, the "sweetheart tree of the ancient world", and reminds him of the wedding night. There he awakened or aroused her, after heeding the warnings not to hurry or steal this experience from marriage.

The king honours her mother by mentioning the conception and childbirth experiences, and appears to say that these painful times were necessary to bring new life into the world. Her feelings of inferior status, anxiety over his vocational absences, and her unfulfilled sexual longings have all been part of fruitful pain birthing a committed lifelong friendship.

3. Love is protective, symbolized by the seal placed over one's heart and on one's arm. A seal is a visible way for an "owner" to say, I will give my affection and protection to this "possession", and claim the freedom to enjoy this possession in a way that's off-limits to everyone else. I have always felt that the wedding ring is a visible way of saying, "We belong to each other and all others are reminded to respect this "seal" and keep their eyes and hands at home." It's OK in the middle of an argument to remind your partner, "Guess what, honey, you are stuck with me. We're going to see this through."

This also helps to explain the sometimes confusing I Corinthians 7.3-5, which insists that our bodies belong also to our partners. Each is called to "fulfill their marital duty". Saying no to sexual enjoyment is allowed for three reasons that rarely surface in counselling appointments: by mutual consent, for a short season, and to focus on prayer. (The proverbial headache seems to be missing...)

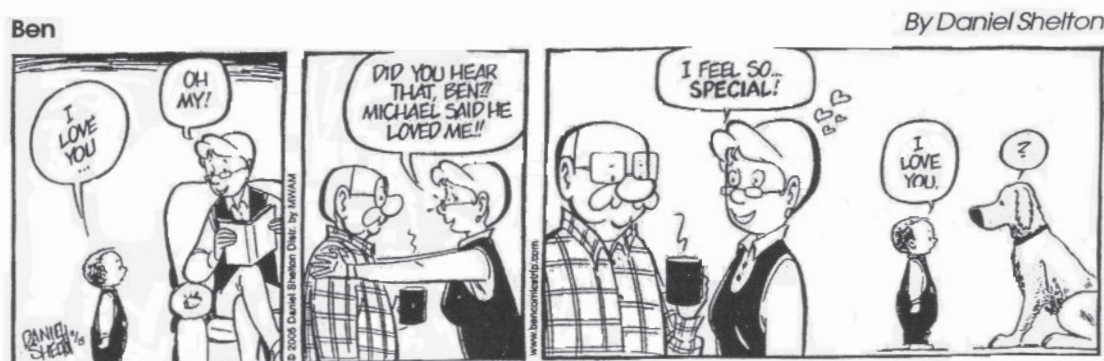
4. Love is permanent. The next two lines in verse 6 speak about death and the grave, and underline the lifelong loyalty which is part of the fabric of our love. In the Canadian province where we used to live, it is now permissible for bride and groom to say to each other at the wedding, "As long as we both shall love." One letter changed, but what a monstrous alteration!

Counsellor Jay Adams has a much better handle on this. When a couple visits his office explaining that they want a divorce because "they just do not love each other any more", he calmly replies with a smile, "Well, I guess you'd better learn..."

Many a marriage can experience hope once the partners grasp Jesus' linking of love with obedience, especially in John 13-16. Love finds its best home not in the rationalization of our minds, or the roller-coaster of our emotions, but in the resolve of our wills!

5. Love is purifying, according to the last line in verse 6. It must be treated with the greatest caution and respect, like a fire. Fire both destroys and purifies, depending on what lies in its path: flimsy constructions of cardboard or wood, or precious buried metals such as silver or gold.

The message may even seem a little deeper, since the divine "Jah" at the end suggests a possible reading of "...the very flame of the Lord". If we're not willing to count the cost attached to "I love you", we probably should not use the words too often or too lightly.



6. Love is also powerful, keeping the flame burning in the face of the waters and rivers of verse 7. We're talking about a lasting flame, not "the latest flame". The diamond's facets have room both for raging fires and rushing waters! In our culture we've probably had enough of the sloppy, sentimental variety of love celebrated in the greeting cards. Love is both soft and strong, both tender and tough.

The clue is in the passage: rivers and waterfalls cannot douse the flame of love. And the flame has both warmth and light, both the compassion of love and the conviction of love. Don't you ever wonder why Jesus said in John 8.12, "If you continue in My word..., the truth will set you free"? (Wouldn't much of our culture, including our own Christian subculture, be more comfortable with "...and Jesus' love will set you free"?)

7. Finally, love is priceless, highlighted in the last picture and facet of our diamond. Love does not have a price tag. To a prostitute we can say, "How much?", but to a marriage partner we can only say, "You love me... that much?" Sex is bought, love is given.

I love the cartoon of the king, standing on his balcony, waiting to address thousands of his subjects in the plaza below. Wistfully, he turns to his queen and asks, "But how can I make them love me...?" He cannot, of course. He can command obedience, but love operates in matters of the heart. It can only be freely received, and freely given away again.

The last phrase has Solomon's fingerprints all over it. "All the wealth of his house..." would have a familiar ring in the Jerusalem palace and Solomon, quite capable of forcing response from numerous women, must have been relieved and delighted with the Shulamith's voluntary love. For the two of them, the splendour of this passage had a specific name and face!

On the next page we suggest a structure for this amazing sixteen line poem about marital love.

III. RESOURCES

1. Chapman, Gary. *The Five Love Languages* (1992). Northfield.
 Gary treats the avenues of spoken words, thoughtful presents, physical affection, quality time, and kind action. He suggests that almost all of us are especially good at expressing love in one or two of these ways, and are also prone to recognize and receive love if it comes wrapped in a certain “package”.
2. *The Marriage Course* is put out by Alpha International, the Alpha Course people from Holy Trinity Brompton in London (2000). The manual has seven workbook sections including the final one which helps us practice Chapman’s five love languages.
3. *The Marriage Book* by Nicky and Sila Lee, also put out by Alpha International.

SS 8:5 Who is this coming up from the desert leaning on her lover? Under the apple tree I roused you; there your mother conceived you, there she who was in labour gave you birth.	Promising Painful	<u>Metaphors</u>
SS 8:6 Place me like a seal over your heart, like a seal on your arm; for love is as strong as death, its jealousy unyielding as the grave. It burns like blazing fire, like a mighty flame.		
SS 8:7 Many waters cannot quench love; rivers cannot wash it away. If one were to give all the wealth of his house for love, it would be utterly scorned.	Protective Permanent Purifying Powerful Priceless	“ <u>like</u> ” X 2 (<u>“as”</u> X 2) the <u>heart</u> of the passage “ <u>like</u> ” X 2 <u>Metaphors</u>

IV. RESPONSE

- A. If a personal glimpse may be permitted... Four weeks after we met, I said to Cathy Sonke, "I love you." She replied, "And what is love?" Not the ecstatic answer I had expected, but she had heard that word before...

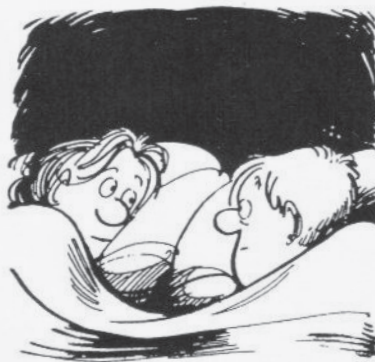
Fortunately, I had read Walter Trobisch's great book *I Married You*, and I said, "Love is a decision to be faithful." Cathy had already stimulated my thoughts and stirred my emotions, and now head and heart flowed into the will, the decision to be loyal, *until death us do part*.

It has been a wonderful thirty-three year story of exploring the seven facets of that diamond together, and also producing four diamond chips that are now sparkling in other places.

- B. Which book are the two of you reading right now that is strengthening and stretching your marriage? Remember that a good healthy marriage is your best gift to your family, and a healthy family is one of your best gifts to your worlds of church and work.

For Better or For Worse

By LYNN JOHNSTON



LYNN

Study Fourteen

Source of Married Love (8.8-14)

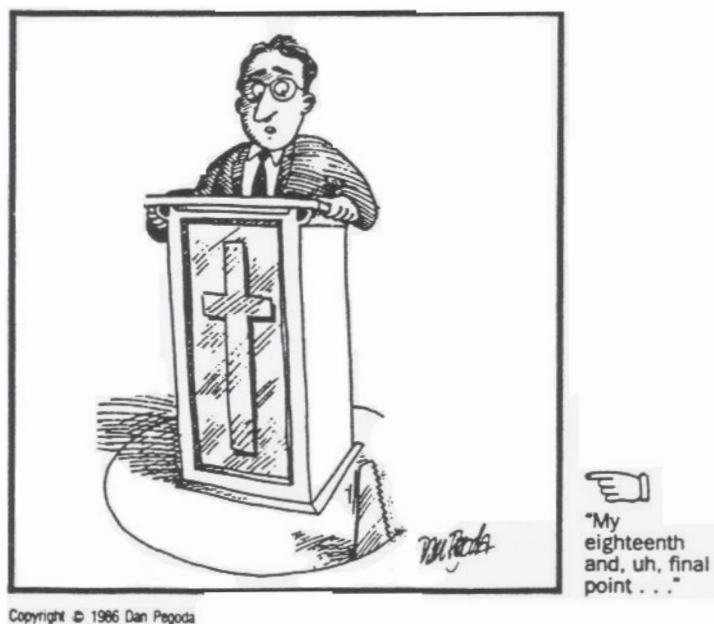
I. READY?

The Questions (for personal study, or group use)

1. On first reading, what does this passage seem to be saying to you? What is its connection with the preceding three verses?
2. If it is her brothers that once again appear in the Song, what is their role in the life of their sister?
3. What is her response? How has she acted in the spirit of I Thessalonians 4.3-8, even though she had never read the words?
4. How would you interpret verses 11-12, and is there a possible hint of bride price or lobola in that last verse?
5. What is the central theme of their last little conversation in verses 13-14?
6. As we come to the end of the Song, share 2-3 major discoveries you have made, and also 2-3 areas where you will need further study and reflection.
7. What would you say to someone who is troubled by the fact that God's Name is not mentioned anywhere in the Song?

The Quest (for more understanding)

In your class or discussion group, make a personal list of all the Christ-church analogies you can find in the Solomon-Shulamith relationship. Share as a group, and decide which suggestions are helpful, which are doubtful, and which should be gently shredded...



II. REFLECTION

It was Winston Churchill who said, “The farther back we look, the farther forward we can see.” In our last passage of the Song today, a flashback to the bride’s pre-teen years gives us a fascinating glimpse of one source of the love celebrated in the previous passage. We’ll find that a good marriage starts long before it starts, and that it takes more than two people to make it work. We’ll notice four things:

1. The support team is mentioned in 8.8-9. The stepbrothers, who didn’t come off too well in the first chapter, now appear in a more attractive light in the last. It appears that the father has died, and they step into the responsible role. They are given a voice in the Song, and approach their sister with a choice: already in her pre-teen years she has to think about marriage and what kind of bride she will be. Will she be a wall, saying no to all the wrong suitors so she can say yes to the right one? Or will she be a wide-open door (a promiscuous “revolving door”) to get the attention and affection she craves?

The brothers give her freedom to make the choice, but promise a mixture of devotion and discipline: decorating and beautifying a wall, but providing a fragrant prison if she shows an inability or refusal to handle that latch on the door. Once again, it seems to Cathy and myself that families, close friends, and the church community could play a far more pro-active role in stopping wrong friendships headed for marriage, and steering wayward marriages headed for the rocks. Our courtesy should be coupled not with cowardice but with courage!

2. Sagesse (French word for wisdom...sometimes I need to scramble to make this alliteration stuff work!) The brothers are rewarded in verse 10 when their sister calmly and proudly says, “I am a wall...”, and then, tongue-in-cheek, adds a little joke, “Thus I (the Shulamith) have become in his (Shulam’s) eyes like one bringing (Shalom) peace.”

I am quite sure that “I am a wall” messages on T-shirts will not catch on anytime soon, but what a difference it could make, in Africa and elsewhere, if that slogan would catch on! The answer to the male, “Prove that you love me by” is a firm female response, “Prove that you love me by showing me you can wait.” And guys, don’t even ask! Your wisdom of self-control is a gift for a lifetime, to yourself and your future mate. After the wedding, there will be times that sex is not possible because of cycles or sickness or conferences in faraway places. Can she say, “I can trust him now, because I could trust him before the wedding...”?

Stephen Covey tells the story in *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*. At a sales convention, a friend approached Stephen and confessed lots of anxiety about his wife: “She’s flirting with all my colleagues, and had a business talk with another guy until 2.00 this morning...” Stephen felt the nudge to ask his friend, “When and where did you meet your wife?” When he heard the reply, “Why, it was at this very same convention two years ago, when she was married to someone else...” Stephen replied, “My friend, you cannot wish yourself out of consequences that you behaved yourself into.” That was advice full of sagesse!

3. Submission is another glimpse from her past, described in verses 11-12. We finally get a look at the culture and economy of tenth-century Israel in which the Song

took place. Solomon owned and leased out property all over the Middle East, including some vineyards at (unknown to us) Baal-Hamon. From archaeology finds we know that the tenants would normally share in 20% of the profits.

The Shulamith submits herself to Solomon voluntarily: "...my own vineyard is mine to give; the thousand shekels are for you..." Submission is not a doormat, "whatever you say, dear", but it is a free submitting of all her past, her insights and preferences and resources, into the decision-making process. So she cleverly suggests, "...those who tend its fruit (i.e. my brothers) deserve two hundred shekels. Without their support I would not be the wife I am to you today..." That sounds a bit like lobola!

Cathy and I have had a good time over the years sharing this passage with young people, but also with young parents. We tell parents that they are not only raising a three-year-old son and one-year-old daughter, for instance, but also a likely future husband and a future wife.

For the young people, we strongly recommend that, since marriage starts long before it starts, that they invest in six relationships before God may provide them with the seventh of a lifetime marital friend. First, getting to know God and His willingness to forgive is a good investment. Knowing we are forgiven can help us to extend it in those numerous occasions when friction calls for a little oil. Spending quality time with parents and siblings are second and third. Practicing growing the fruit of the Spirit in the home we come from makes it a little easier to practice in the home we're going to. We like to encourage a person, when a relationship starts looking serious, to visit his/her friend's family and home. And we ask them to observe how he treats his mother and how she gets along with her father.

Developing friendships with our own gender is the fourth investment. The fifth is to grow in social skills with groups of three or more of mixed gender. I see red flags going up if a young man has no male buddies, or focuses exclusively on one girl at a conference or other weekend event. Be a friend to have a friend. Interested people are interesting people. All rather trite clichés, but if we cannot make our "social glue" stick before marriage, how can we make one friendship stick for several decades?

The sixth is optional: developing a one-to-one friendship with someone of the opposite sex, with no strings attached. In my college years Judy L. helped me understand how opposite the opposite sex really was on our monthly "dates", but if anyone had wondered about romance between the two of us, she would have laughed (or cringed...).

Since investing in six relationships takes time and energy, and an intentional attitude, Cathy and I generally do not counsel couples toward marriage until each is at least 21, and have spent significant time with each other for at least six months.

4. Selfless orientation may explain the last two verses (8.13-14), which seem to be hanging on like an appendix! This little conversation, still in her homeland countryside, opens windows on their future walk together (into the proverbial sunset).

We would expect him to be somewhat eager to return to the capital and his crowded agenda. And if he stays, well, her expansion of their sexual inventory was quite wonderful... But no, he affirms her cluster of friends gathered around, who are all probably wanting to see what it was like to hang out with a king. And he again asks for her comments, her feelings, her hopes and fears: "Let me hear your voice!"

She, on the other hand, probably wished they could extend this short holiday by a month or six... She could share (gossip) non-stop over late evening pizzas with her family and childhood friends about life in the palace and life with the king. But no, she encourages their departure, and being alone again, to re-visit the familiar world of gazelles and young stags and spicy mountains.

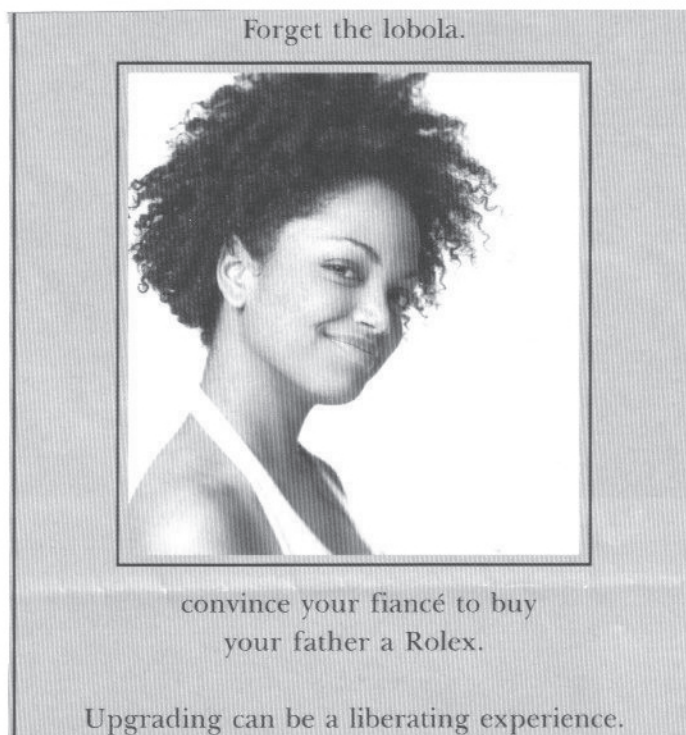
Each is so in tune with the other's needs! Remember Herman Oeser's counsel: "If you want to be happy, don't get married. But if you want to make someone else happy..."

We started this last study with Churchill's observation that "the farther backward we look, the farther forward we can see." For all of us reading these lines, that's even more true. If we look back almost 3,000 years, and practice the principles of this book, and learn to sing its Song without going off-key or missing a beat, we can look farther forward.

We can look forward to marriages, our own and others', where statistics of abuse and adultery and abandonment actually go down. Where the practice of one man - one woman - one lifetime can actually lead to a world where predators like AIDS become not a menace but a memory. We can be agents spreading divine AIDS - an acquired integrity development syndrome!!

III. RESOURCES

1. Questionnaire for husbands and wives, two sheets for each.
2. Seventeen Questions from Glamour magazine, January 1997.
3. Sheet designed to help us in developing friendships.
4. Ortberg, John and Nancy. *The Life You've Always Wanted* (2002). Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing, pp. 131-132.



MARRIAGE QUESTIONNAIRE for MEN

20 QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR WIFE

1. How can I make you feel more loved?
2. Do you feel you are the most important person in my life?
If not, what makes you feel otherwise?
3. How can I better communicate how important you are to me?
4. How can I better understand when you need comfort, encouragement, or assurance (i.e. when is this most needed and how is it best expressed?)
5. Am I gentle and assuring during crisis?
6. How would you evaluate my leadership and responsiveness during conflict?
7. What three words would you use to describe our marriage?
Give examples of each.
8. What are my strongest areas of leadership? Explain.
9. What are my weakest areas of leadership? Explain.
10. On a scale of 1 - 10 rate these three aspects of my communication skills
 - Initiative
 - Content
 - Listening
 Explain
11. If you could change one thing in me what would it be?
12. On a scale of 1 - 10 how would you evaluate my role with our children? Explain each:
 - Overall involvement
 - Teaching and training
 - Friendship
 - Discipline:
 - Consistent involvement
 - Clear guidelines
 - Full restoration
 - Support for wife
 - Example of relationship with Jesus
13. How would you evaluate my pursuit of romance? Explain. How can I improve?
14. How would you evaluate my involvement in and oversight of our finances? Explain.
15. How would you evaluate my oversight of our schedule?
16. How would you evaluate my involvement in your
 - Spiritual health and development?
 - Physical health and development?
 - Social health and development?
 - Intellectual health and development?
 - Recreational health and development?
 Explain each.
17. How would you evaluate my leadership and concern for the health and development of our sexual relationship and your sexual fulfillment?
18. Do I demonstrate a relationship with God that makes you feel secure? Explain.
19. What one area do you find most difficult to understand about me?
20. What do you see as my most admirable quality? How can I further develop this area of strength?

MARRIAGE AND FAMILY EVALUATION for MEN

1. Men, please rate your wives in the following areas:
- | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|-----------|
| Affirming you as priority | Poor | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | Excellent |
| Romance | Poor | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | Excellent |
| Initiative in communication | Poor | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | Excellent |
| Date night consistency | Poor | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | Excellent |
| Intimacy (physical, spiritual, emotional) | Poor | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | Excellent |

Comments:

.....

.....

2. The two areas I would most like to see my wife change in the next six months are: (Explain)

a)

b)

3. What are her three greatest strengths in the home? (Please illustrate if able)

- a)
- b)
- c)

4. Please rate your wife in the following areas of home life:

- | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|-----------|
| Overall involvement with children | Poor | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | Excellent |
| Teaching and training | Poor | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | Excellent |
| Companionship with kids | Poor | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | Excellent |
| Child Discipline (consistency, methodology, etc.) | Poor | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | Excellent |
| Godly example | Poor | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | Excellent |

Comments:.....

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5. My wife would be a more effective partner at home if only she
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MARRIAGE QUESTIONNAIRE for WOMEN**20 QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR HUSBAND**

1. How can I make you feel more loved?
 2. Do you feel you are the most important person in my life? If not, what makes you feel otherwise?
 3. How can I better communicate how important you are to me?
 4. How can I better understand when you need support, encouragement, or assurance (i.e. when is this most needed and how is it best expressed?)
 5. Am I responsive to your leadership during crisis?
 6. How would you evaluate my responsiveness and self-control during conflict?
 7. What three words would you use to describe our marriage? Give examples of each.
 8. What are my strongest areas as a wife? Explain.
 9. What are my weakest areas as a wife? Explain.
 10. On a scale of 1 - 10 rate these three aspects of my communication skills
 - Timing (knowing when to initiate)
 - Content
 - Listening
 Explain
 11. If you could change one thing in me what would it be?
 12. On a scale of 1 - 10 how would you evaluate my role with our children? Explain each:
 - Overall involvement
 - Teaching and training
 - Friendship
 - Discipline
 - Example of relationship with Jesus
13. How would you evaluate my pursuit of romance? Explain. How can I improve?
 14. How would you evaluate my use of our finances? Explain.
 15. How would you evaluate my ability to care for our home?
 - Planning
 - Prioritising
 - Follow-through
 Explain
 16. How can I encourage and inspire you in your
 - Spiritual health and development?
 - Physical health and development?
 - Social health and development?
 - Intellectual health and development?
 - Recreational health and development?
 Explain each.
 17. How would you evaluate my responsiveness in, and concern for the health and development of our sexual relationship and your sexual fulfillment?
 - Do I demonstrate a relationship with God that makes you feel secure and free to lead? Explain.
 18. What one area do you find most difficult to understand about me?
 19. What do you see as my most admirable quality? How can I further develop this area of strength?

MARRIAGE AND FAMILY EVALUATION for WOMEN

1. Ladies, please rate your husbands in the following areas:

Affirming you as priority Poor 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Excellent

Romance Poor 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Excellent

Initiative in communication Poor 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Excellent

Date night consistency Poor 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Excellent

Intimacy (physical, spiritual, emotional) Poor 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Excellent

Comments:
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2. The two areas I would most like to see my husband change in the next six months are: (Explain)

a)

b)

3. What are his three greatest strengths in the home? (Please illustrate if able)

a)

b)

c)

4. Please rate your husband in the following areas of home life:

Overall involvement with children Poor 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Excellent

Teaching and training Poor 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Excellent

Companionship with kids Poor 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Excellent

Child Discipline (consistency, methodology, etc.) Poor 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Excellent

Godly example Poor 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Excellent

Comments:.....

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5. My husband would be a more effective leader at home if only he

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Editorial

17 questions that could change your life

This new year, don't resolve. Reflect

SOMETHING IN THE HUMAN SPIRIT SEEMS TO demand a ritual of renewal at the start of a new year, a metaphoric squaring of the shoulders and clearing of the throat before we take it from the top—and try to get it right this time. And so, we resolve: I will lose ten pounds, volunteer at a soup kitchen, be nicer to my mother. Only to find that our well-intentioned declaratives have exhausted resolve rather than strengthened it—even before Valentine's Day.

This new year, we propose an alternative to resolutions: Rather than resolve, reflect. Rather than declare, question. Don't expect the answers to come easily. Dare to doubt. Be willing to stir up an internal insurrection. Yes, uncertainty can be unsettling. But the answers to these questions can be revealing as well.

1. If I had to wear my philosophy of life as a motto on a T-shirt, what would it be? Of course, no one can be summed up in an epigrammatic sentence or two. But, just for fun, why not try?

2. When was the last time I felt joy? Not just pleasure, joy. Was it provoked by a someone, a something, a somewhere? That soaring feeling still lives inside of me. What can I do to wake it up?

3. Is there anything unfinished in my life that I am willing to walk away from forever? If I haven't thus far learned French, gotten a dog, started my own business, maybe it's time to make room for new dreams. Hit delete. See what happens.

4. Am I inhibited by a fear of failing? Just for a moment, pretend that failure is a triumph, not a shame. Now what would I reach for, what would I risk?

5. If I were to take my ten-year-old self to lunch, what would she think of me? Do I still have her passions, her opinions, her willfulness? Do I still know what she knows?

6. Do I believe in God? What exactly is my position on the Big Questions? Do I have spiritual beliefs that are truly my own, not someone else's?

7. Have I made a home for myself? Or am I still waiting for My Real Life to begin? I already know I don't have to be married or mortgaged or otherwise permanently committed to nest. So what's keeping me from saying this is My Real Life right now?

8. If I could take a six-month sabbatical from my current job, what would I do? Travel around the world? Perform good deeds? Put my bottom in a chair and my head in a book? If I don't know the answer, how can I begin to figure out what my dream is?

9. What do I like most about my appearance? What are my secret vanities? Can I be a show-off for a change? Can I strut my stuff on a regular basis?

10. How do I envision myself at age 60? What would I like to look like? What would I like to know that I don't know now? What should I be doing now that I will happily look back on then?

11. Am I living my life for an audience? Have I internalized a watchful someone: Mom, my best friend, an ex-boyfriend? Is my audience worthy of judging me? How can I banish them forever and live for myself?

12. What can I do about the people I have disappointed and been disappointed by? If I could heal a damaged relationship, would I? Is there anyone whose lost friendship and regard I mourn? Or is it time to move on?

13. How much money will I need for retirement? Does simply asking the question make me hyperventilate? Can I stand to do the math? Am I brave enough to begin?

14. Am I as healthy as I want to be? If I imagine myself, circa 2000, how would I like to feel, physically and mentally. What steps should I be taking now to make sure that ideal becomes reality?

15. Am I capable of being alone? Does the prospect of an entire weekend by myself stimulate or panic me? If I'm not in psychic shape for the occasional bout of solitude, I need to be. Start thinking about what is scary about aloneness and how to overcome it.

16. Do I see success as a lavish banquet or a scarce commodity? When a good friend triumphs, do I feel depleted—as if there's a limited amount of goodies to go around? Is it possible to transform envy into a this-means-I-can-do-it-too signal?

17. How do I want to love and be loved? What is my definition of a wonderful marriage, partnership, love affair? How close have I come to finding that? What is left for me to know or do in order to attract the love I want?



The healthy and strong plants of courtship, marriage and sex seem to grow best in the soil of friendship. Here are some questions about friendship, for your own reflection and discussion.

1. Can you go through life without friendship?
2. When you first came to your present school or university, how did you go about developing friendships?
3. What is your mix of spiritual and non-spiritual friendships? (How close can you get to another person without having a spiritual component?)
4. Describe the closest friendship you've ever had. What made it so special?
5. Is a male-female friendship possible without any thoughts of courtship developing on either side? If so, how?
6. What has been your experience in mentoring friendships? (Paul-Timothy or older-younger friendships, in terms of age or spiritual maturity)
7. How many of you would say that God is your closest friend? What evidence can you offer?
8. What are your main areas of irritation with other people?
9. Who is the hardest person you've ever had to deal with, and how did you?
10. What is God's purpose in allowing such people into our lives?

John Ortberg writes in *The Life You've Always Wanted*

Sometime ago I woke up in the middle of the night. Dawn was hours away, but I could see quite clearly in our bedroom because moonlight was streaming through the window.

I looked at my wife, Nancy, sleeping beside me, and suddenly, instead of feeling groggy as one might expect, I was overwhelmed by the most intense sense of love. It was as if I saw our entire married life in one kaleidoscopic viewing. One scene after another replayed in my mind: the afternoon we met, our first private joke, the first time we ever laughed really hard together, secret nicknames and hidden traditions, the way she smiled at me when she walked down the aisle at our wedding. I saw all those kinds of events – some momentous, some trivial but for some reason unforgettable – that anyone who has ever loved will carry to the grave.

I thought what my life would be like without Nancy. I thought not just how empty it would be, but how that who I am now is somehow wrapped up in this one sleeping beside me.

For the longest time I just watched my wife in silent wonder as she slept. I studied her face. It was one of the most tender moments I have ever known.

Then something else happened that I did not expect. Propped up on one elbow and watching Nancy sleep, I thought, *While I lie in bed sleeping, God is watching me.* As the psalmist expressed it, 'He who keeps you will not slumber. He who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.'

And the thought came to me that God was saying something to this effect:

I love you like that. While you lay sleeping, no one can see you, but I watch you. My heart is full of love for you. What your heart is feeling right now as you watch your wife, what a parent feels watching a child, is a little picture for you, a gift, so you can know – every night when you go to sleep – that this is my heart for you. I want you to reflect on this at night before you close your eyes. I'm watching you, and I'm full of love.

It was an overwhelming moment. I had the sense that God himself was somehow speaking to me. These were not just thoughts *about* God, but thoughts *from* God. I felt that God wanted to speak of his love to me – *personally*.

John recounts waking Nancy to tell her of this experience, and says, "Waking her was clearly *not* God's leading..."

IV. RESPONSE

- A. How could the following paragraphs help us in responding to the SOS material that we have studied?

We remember ...

10% of what we **hear**
50% of what we **say**
70% of what we **see**
90% of what we **do**.

There is a bit of irony in our consideration of these statistics. Most educators know that activity is the best way to learn. Hearing a message is but a small part of the kind of learning which results in positive life change. But educational programs are not normally structured for an effective blend of hearing, seeing and doing. We are much more inclined to offer our pupils the chance to hear only. Thus, we see little result. Tests have shown the inefficiency of simply listening to a message. For instance, after listening to a ten-minute presentation, the average listener has heard and comprehended about half of what was said. Within forty-eight hours, however, that drops another 50 percent to a 25 percent effectiveness level. By the end of the week the listeners will be down to 10 percent or less. Forcing people to sit quietly and listen is setting them up for poor retention. Says Howard Hendricks, "Unfortunately, the bulk of Christian education is hearing oriented. That's why it's often so inefficient."

Jesus knew that all four elements were necessary for instruction to have lasting impact. The crowning jewel of His methodology was His penchant for "learning by doing." The effectiveness of Jesus' approach lay in taking His message from the lofty ivory tower confines of the theoretical and theological to the cutting edge of living.

- B. Please listen to and then discuss "Love me like a Song" by Willie Nelson and Kimmie Rhodes. What connections do you see between the two "Songs"? See lyrics at the end of the manual.