

## Doing Marriage East Of Eden

*Song of Solomon 5:2-6:3*



Once upon a time a group of rule-loving (perhaps obsessed?) Pharisees tested Jesus with this question: *“Is it lawful to divorce one’s wife for any cause?”* After our Lord responded, the disciples respond to Jesus’ no-easy-divorce policy, *“If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry.”* (Matthew 19:10). In other words, *“You mean, Jesus, I’m stuck with this woman because the union of husband and wife trumps whatever transgressions I can trump up against my wife? You know, like her overbearing Mother, her overdrawn bank account, her overtoasting the toast? If that’s the case . . . it’s better not to marry!”*

So far in our journey through Solomon’s greatest song, when it comes to marriage, we’ve encountered more idealism than realism. Basically, chapters 1-5 have presented a polished, appealing, poetically stated picture of idealistic, Edenic love between a man and a woman.

But now, in this next section of the song, we find ourselves EAST of Eden, and we’ve moved from the uninterrupted revelries of married life to the inevitable realism to marriage in a fallen (and often frustrating) world. This part of the love poem ends well (6:3), but that’s *not* how it begins! Let’s ask a couple of questions that may offer some insight into what happens not *if*, but *when* “sleeping beauty” wakes up on the wrong side of the bed and “prince charming” isn’t all that charming, after all!

### 1. **What is the poetry doing?** (cf 5:2-6)

This is a story-poem, with literary embellishment, designed to create a mood and make a point.

- The mood is TENSE; the point is CONFLICT. It’s part of post-honeymoon life in a fallen world. Here’s the scene, and I take it to be somewhere between literal and metaphorical: This couple has scheduled a time to be together, physically. She’s gotten herself ready, perhaps even smoothed on some of his favorite scent from Bath & Body Works. And she waited. And waited. And waited. For hours. Finally, she gives up. And goes to sleep. HE has NOT clued in to what the “plans” were.

Perhaps he's been watching some big screen football and knocking back a few brewskis at Georgia Blue. Or playing cards. Or whatever. So HE knocks on the door, and begins his sweet-talking to her. "Come on, sweet thang, sweet potato pie, butter cup, open the door, let me in."

Half-dazed, the woman responds, "It's late! Too late! 'Well . . . it's too late, baby, now it's too late . . . ' (a la Carol King). You COULD have called! WHY DIDN'T YOU CALL?!?" He responds, "Because phones haven't been invented yet???" "Don't care, I'm not putting on my robe, soiling my feet, and coming to the door!" She thinks she's played her cards quite well. But evidently, her husband's some kind of smooth talker! She spritzes on, then slathers on a bottle of "Ode de Myrrh" on her body, but she's overplayed her hand. Her teasing revenge has backfired, Vv 5-6 . . . And her passion turns to panic. So she decides to go out into the streets and find him.

- **What's happening poetically is this: It's a mixture of INSENSITIVITY, SELFISHNESS, and REVENGE. And it gets *really ugly* in Vv 6-7 . . .** Her protector husband has left her unprotected. She feels defenseless and defeated.
- **Vs 9 brings a "note" of sarcasm from the chorus line. Talk about a one-two punch!** Where did THEY come from? The illogical flow of all this seems like a dream, or a nightmare. [a dream where I was playing a guitar made out of a watermelon, and Carol comes in and asks if I'd picked up the steaks for tonight since we were having Johnny Carson over. I look, & Carol & I are both wearing bathing suits, and performing in front of the congregation of the church were I grew up in Hattiesburg, and my dog's using the bathroom on the flowers in front of the pulpit!]

Don't know how we get to Vs 9, but the "DOJ" Chorus line refrain has somewhat of a sarcastic tone to it. "Oh Wonder-Woman, what's so special about your Superman?!?" First, she is beaten up by MEN who were supposed to PROTECT the UNPROTECTED. Then, her BRIDESMAIDS are ridiculing her.

- **In Vv 8-16, from the wife, there's a top-to-bottom physical description of the man, almost unequalled in Scripture.** Notice how this wife RESISTS the temptation to join in the chorus of tearing down and demeaning her husband in the presence of other women. You know, "Yeah, he IS a jerk . . . ALL MEN are jerks . . . let's get on the VIEW and talk about what BAD PEOPLE ALL MEN ARE!!"

On the contrary, this lady's description of her man indicates that he is pure GOLD and worth going after! You know, other than the symbolic description of Jesus in Revelation, this is the ONLY inventory of a man's features found in the Bible. And it's VERY positive. Notice how, unlike the husband's description of the wife, this woman's description of her husband seems to focus more on his FACE and is more MODEST than what the man had to say. Plus, he's her FRIEND, Vs 16. She wants him back.

- **So, WHO found WHO? (cf 6:1-3)** Why look! He's here. We don't know who found who. Doesn't matter. Love doesn't keep score (**1 Cor. 13**). All we know is, they're together, "Reunited, and it feels so good . . ." by the duet Peaches and Herb (who also sung, "Shake your goove thing"), 1978.

Strange sequence, to be sure. Maybe even a dream sequence. Opinions are divided. But there ARE lessons to be learned in this bizarre bit of poetry.

## 2. **What *lessons* does the poetry teach us?**

- **First lesson: Get REAL!** Life in a fallen world full of sinful people INCLUDING people like EVERY HUSBAND and EVERY WIFE in this room. Let me tee this up for you and tell it straight.

→ **The realistic rhythm of married life is one of FRUSTRATION and DELIGHT!** [SS, "Do you have a REALISTIC or IDEALISTIC view of your Pastor?" Pastor's wife, "REALISTIC!!!" Pastor is a sinner, and it takes a sinner to know a sinner!] [Attended a marriage retreat once, where the husband of a couple that had been married 20 YEARS offered this testimony, "In our marriage, I have been happily married for 20 years, but my WIFE has been happily married for only 10 years . . ." The man had our attention. Then he said, that, like a LOT of men, he was married to his WORK,

and had justified neglecting his wife since he was, after all, “. . . doing the work of the LORD and how DARE my wife get in the way of the Lord’s work!”]

Listen, we are ALL capable of creating FRUSTRATION in our marriages. When 2 CHRISTIANS say their wedding vows, it’s 2 people who are (to paraphrase Luther) at the same time SAINTS and SINNERS saying “I DO”.

- **The idea of a perfect marriage is an IDOL, so don’t worship it!** To make living happily and effortlessly together for the rest of your lives is both “to dream the impossible dream” AND to make romance and marriage into a god. Love and marriage may go together like a horse and carriage in a SONG, but DON’T turn that SONG into a HYMN of PRAISE to the “PERFECT MARRIAGE”! Marriage is NOT God. Only GOD is God. So what IS marriage, besides a “Covent of Commitment”?
- **Marriage is a TOOL for our SANCTIFICATION!** Marriage gives you opportunities, almost every day, to offer HONEST CONFESSION, GRACE and FORGIVENESS to each other. Marriage gives you several opportunities to GROW into being more CHRISTLIKE in the way you deal with the MOST “significant other” in your life, other than God Himself.

Joel Nederhood of the old “Back To God Hour” radio show once said, “Marriage is a TRINITY of interlocking circles. There’s the HUSBAND, the WIFE, and GOD. All 3 relationships affect the other two. All 3 relationships are MEANT to affect each other.” Not paying attention to and cultivating all 3 relationships is a recipe for misery! [. . . a couple having a spat walking into church and wearing a mask . . . or worse, staying away from church B/C they were having a spat . . . they NEED church, and they NEED to own up to their issues!]

- **Second lesson: DENY self!**

- **The greatest obstacle to marital intimacy is SELFISHNESS.** In the Text we considered, BOTH husband AND wife are being selfish. HE’s selfish, and somehow thinks that home is the 24 hour drive-through @ Burger King: He wants it HIS way, right away. He’s inconsiderate, demanding, and foolishly

selfish. She's also selfish, "HE'S making me go out of MY way, so HE can get HIS way; and follows with the egocentric "I have . . ." Not now, honey. YOUR way? NO WAY!!

→ **Growing marriages make the shift from SELFISHNESS to SELFLESSNESS; and from the EGOTISTIC "I" to the ALTRUSTIC "I".** The turning point of this story seems to be when, in spite of hurt feelings and a bruised ego, she goes after him and even speaks well of him to others. VERY HARD for a selfish person to do! But yet they ARE together at the end of the story. She seems to be acting in selfLESSness, and she is being PROACTIVE and not REACTIVE. In that sense, the wife is reflecting a REDEMPTIVE love that goes after the object of her love, regardless of whether he DESERVES her love or not! Sound like Anyone YOU know? Someone who set His love upon you & went after you EVEN when you were unlovely and unresponsive to Him? Sounds like what GOD has done in Jesus, doesn't it? While we were yet sinners, Jesus DIED for us, **Romans 5:1ff.**

### Here are 3 ways to be more self-LESS:

➤ **You should have open EYES.** Eyes that are OPEN to what a GIFT you have in your Spouse. FOCUS on what you LOVE about your spouse. Remember how you USED to look @ your spouse "I only have eyes for you . . ." And LOOK at your spouse through the eyes of UNCONDITIONAL LOVE, that "There's NOTHING you can do to make me NOT love you! There may be CONSEQUENCES to those negative things you do, but one of the CONSEQUENCES will NOT be that I withhold my love for you. Or leave you." Don't THREATEN. [Ruth Graham, "I DON'T believe in divorce, but I DO believe in justifiable homicide!" Sometimes I feel like I would like to KILL him (not actually, but maybe . . . ); but I will NEVER un-love him.

Also, open your EYES to the COMMITMENT you have taken before God and witnesses. Marriage may not be "Just a piece of paper," but that paper, that marriage license, represents a BINDING COVENANT between a man and a woman for a *life time* of "for BETTERING" AND

“for WORSING.” Sometimes, it will be better; sometimes worse. The commitment is there, nevertheless. To tweek some other song lyrics, God says when it comes to marriage (and everything else in life), “I beg your pardon, I never promised you a rose garden!” @ least not until we live in the New Heavens & the New Earth, which will be a perfect RESTORATION of the Garden of Eden.

- **You should have an open MOUTH.** Notice even this tense time in their marriage, this couple’s speech towards each other is honest, considerate, constructive, and tender. When you are going through a tense time in your marriage, do you ever OPEN your mouth? Or do you give the silent treatment? And when you DO open your mouth, WHAT do you say? Anything NICE? Or do you use your words to SLASH and STAB. Remember Proverbs 18:21, The power of life and death is in the TONGUE (speech). Words HURT, but words also HEAL.
- **You should have an open DOOR.** While there are times (usually severe times) when for your own safety and for the safety and well-being of the family, you will have to physically leave the house, you should strive by God’s grace to being approachable, even in times of conflict. “Fight & flight” is not doing marriage God’s way. And it breeds insecurity in marriage, and opens the door for the devil to do a number on your marriage. You need to be, for the most part, open and approachable to your spouse – even when they offend you. A thick skin and a tender heart is a rare combination, but a good and godly combination, nevertheless. God doesn’t “cut us off” when we offend Him (which is every day). We should strive by God’s grace not to cut our spouse off, either.

### **Here are 2 *benefits* of self-denial:**

- **It will make your MARRIAGE go better. Can’t help but!** It’s HEAVENLY living with a self-LESS person; it’s HELLISH living with a SELFISH person. Nuff said. That’s self-evidently true. Most of us, in SOME relationship we’ve had, have been there and done that.

- **It will mirror (as best as a fallen sinner can) the heart of the GOSPEL.**  
The heart of the GOSPEL is self-DENIAL.



The four arrows point to the cross. Anyway you turn it, the arrows point to the cross, and . . . that's the way our marriages should be: CROSS-CENTERED. SACRIFICIAL.

REDEMPTIVE.

**5:16 ultimately the CROSS points to CHRIST. And what is He the epitome of? (cf *Phillipians 2:6-8; Ephesians 5:21-33*)** Christ is the epitome of self-DENIAL. Jesus is the ULTIMATE EXAMPLE of self-denial, giving up what He had to live and die for His people. When we UN-selfish ourselves in marriage, we at least BEGIN to mirror the way Jesus the Bridegroom relates to US, His bride. The FALLEN WORLD says, “Assert yourself!” Jesus says, “DENY yourself and think HOW you can serve others – and of course, how you can self-LESSLY serve your spouse!”