

... Kisses Sweeter Than Wine

Song of Solomon 1:2-4



Imagine gathering your twelve and thirteen year old daughters together for a daily Bible reading time. You ask, “What would you like to read from the Bible today?” (Usually a good question, but *not* today!) One of them randomly opens the Bible to *Song Of Solomon Chapter 1* and asks, “Dad / Mom, why don’t you read *this*?” How would *you* answer the question? Especially since it is, after all, in the Bible?!? MOST OBVIOUS ANSWER: “Ask your MOTHER!” It’s hard to explain to your daughters how the 2 things I will do my best in the next decade to teach them to avoid – kissing boys and comparing such kissing to alcoholic

consumption – made it into the Bible!

What we are & are not being told right off the bat, & why... Notice there’s no gradual “warming up” to the theme here! The writer jumps right in to the action. The ABRUPTNESS is quite remarkable. No wonder that Jewish Rabbis warned the young men especially in their congregations to NOT read this book until they were @ least 30 years old! The theme of physical love between a man and a woman is pretty much “in your face” here . . . and what’s NOT being told is the backstory, the love story. What about the couple brought them to this point? We are not told. At this point, it’s NOT that their story is unimportant, but that their love is of PRIMARY importance.

What is the poetry doing here? And what do the woman and the man represent? What kind of woman is being presented here? And what about “this kiss”? English poet John Milton who wrote “Paradise Lost”, of all people once remarked that all true poetry is simple, sensuous, and passionate. If so, this IS true poetry! Not a lot of specifics are given. That’s B/C the woman and the man represent EVERY WOMAN and EVERY MAN who have ever been in love.

The WOMAN is the main speaker throughout this song, and it’s INTENTIONAL that there’s no CNN or FOXNEWS in depth reporting here about their specifics. If you break it down, this woman speaks 53% of the time, the man 34%, & the “daughters of Jerusalem” (like the Supremes, or the Pips on Gladys Knight & the Pips) 13% of the time. The woman is the STAR of the song. This woman is neither passive nor weak; neither silent nor shy.

This woman wants to be kissed, and not with the kiss of honor you would give a king or a pope [“You may kiss my ring”] or the kiss of peace from a fellow believer [“greet one another w/a holy kiss”], or a kiss of friendship from your Aunt Gertrude who you dreaded kissing you b/c she would slobber all over your cheeks and neck. This is a “you may now kiss the bride” kind of kiss [which I advise to be warm, but not too prolonged, but some couples ignore my advice].

Notice the movement in the description from Verse 2 to Verse 3. There’s a combination of something here. What is it? She moves from his KISS to his LOVE. She WANTS to be kissed B/C she LOVES him. She uses the metaphor of wine b/c she is intoxicated and DELIGHTED by his kisses. In Psalm 104:15 we’re

told wine “gladdens the heart of man”. And there’s a hint of the joy to come one day in the wine of The Lord’s Supper that points to a time when the FINEST wine will NEVER run out.

Notice some other subtle poetic details and progression of thought . . . There’s a movement here from a physical description to a nonphysical description, from the way he smells to his character, his “name”. Perfume companies make big bucks selling personal “scents” to us. Here the combination of aromatic oils mix with the oils of his body to produce a scent that is uniquely personal to him.

Like it or not, your “Scent” is part of who you are. And everyone has a unique scent. That scent can be enhanced by after shaves, colognes, or oils, or can be detracted by them. [Old Spice Commercial, The traditional white glass bottles, and the grey stoppers. Old Spice Classic shower gel is sold using the slogan “*The original. If your grandfather hadn't worn it, you wouldn't exist.*”] Every body, like every house, has a signature “scent” and to this woman’s nose, this man’s PHYSICAL scent, as well as the SCENT of his CHARACTER, made him appealing to her [Vs “You stink, AND you stink!”]

There’s something truly personal and evocative about SCENT. [Simon Birch, “The last think to leave was her smell”] Her smell and her character were woven together in the fabric of this young man’s memory. [I got in the car w/ “ . . . he smelled fantastic!!! And he was SOOOO sweet and kind”]

Back to his CHARACTER, his REPUTATION. The man’s character is not IRRITABLE to her; his character is IRRESTABLE to her, and for good reason. A woman should be ATTRACTED to the good CHARACTER of a man and should be REPULSED by his bad character! So the PHYSICAL fragrance of his after shave and the METAPHORICAL fragrance of his character overwhelm her. So she ASKS for the man to kiss her and carry her away to the bridal chamber [Think Clark Gable whisking Vivian Lee up the stairs in “Gone With The Wind”]. She doesn’t GRAB his necktie and pull him in to her for a kiss, but pulls his tie and says, “kiss me.” Also note here that the subtle shift from the 3rd person to the 1st person is deliberate, like the difference from calling out from a balcony to someone and that someone being face to face with her, and then “let US” together . . .

One other observation, “. . . **king**” The lady seeks for an image to adorn this man’s honor, worth, and greatness. Yes, “KING” will do. And what man does NOT like to be told he’s great??? Ladies, she who has ears, let her hear. Men respond, and respond well, to PRAISE! Even today in the Orthodox church, on the wedding day, the Bride and Groom are called the “King” and “Queen”. This woman is not whiskey away by some sorry joker she just met in a single’s bar for a “3rd rate romance, low-rent rendezvous.” She is taken away, in marriage, by someone she respects and honors enough to call “King”. And so the “daughters of Jerusalem” join together to sing a chorus of, “Love is a many splendored thing”

SO HOW DOES THIS APPLY TO US?

1. **DESIRE (PHYSICAL DESIRE) is not DEMONIC! But it is DANGEROUS! And it’s not NECESSARY!** (*Genesis 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, and . . . 31; Galatians 5:15*) The DESIRE for physical intimacy is not WRONG, but in a fallen world that distorts and debases EVERYTHING, this DESIRE can be DANGEROUS. Ask Tiger Woods, ask Bill Clinton, ask Jimmy Swaggart, ask Ted Haggard. SIN can take ANYTHING beautiful and good and turn it into something UGLY and WRONG. EROS (physical love) is not EVIL; but EROS outside of God’s boundaries IS evil. Adultery, fornication, bestiality, homosexuality is

what the devil does and what our own fallen natures do to Demean & Denigrate and Distort and Dirty Up what God says is GOOD, when kept w/in the boundaries of a one man, one woman committed covenant marriage relationship.

One other disclaimer. Desire is NATURAL. Desire expressed in the context of marriage is good. BUT, it is NOT necessary. People have died from falling off ladders. People have died by being stung by a swarm of wasps. People have died from lack of food and water. But NO ONE has ever DIED due to lack of expressing physical intimacy with someone of the opposite sex. And remember: THE most FULFILLED human being in the history of mankind (Jesus Christ) lived without having “relations” with a woman. So, don’t buy into a secular myth by equating being truly HUMAN w/being sexually active!

2. In matters of love, both CHEMISTRY and CHARACTER matter. In our Text, the woman loves the man for 2 reasons, and the 1st REASON is his CHARACTER. She esteems his NAME. She RESPECTS the man, his good reputation fills the room like perfume, and so do the daughters of Jerusalem LOVE him! They’re not saying, “What in the WORLD does she see in that jerk! WHY would she want to marry somebody like HIM?!?” The 2nd REASON this woman loves this man is their CHEMISTRY. And in love, both CHARACTER AND CHEMISTRY MATTER! To marry someone apart from their character is just plain stupid! “She’s sooo gorgeous! He’s sooooo hot. He’s soooooo filthy rich!” is to speak foolishness.

CHARACTER COUNTS. The questions a woman SHOULD be asking are questions like, “does He UNDERSTAND me? Is he NOT harsh with me? Does he love me sacrificially? Will he lead and nourish me in my Christian Faith?” No MISSIONARY dating! No EVANGELISTIC dating! With exceptions, of course, that does NOT work! Men, look for TRUE beauty, that is from the inside out [Shallow Hal].

CHARACTER COUNTS. But so does CHEMISTRY. In the Bible, it’s not either-or, but both-and! Friends, Jane Austen wasn’t the first to bring to the world’s attention that one shouldn’t marry for convenience, for economic security, or for social advancement! There’s SOME reason why a love-struck Jacob was more than willing to work 14 years to have beautiful-eyed Rachael’s hand in marriage. Chemistry w/o character AND character w/o chemistry are both recipes for a marriage trainwreck!

3. (If you’re married) The first FLAME of love need not FIZZLE.

There’s a “three step dance” involved.

I will ask “Do you love your wife?” You get a “yes” of commitment. Love = commitment. So far, so good. “Do you LIKE your wife?” “Oh I LIKE her very much!” or “Recently, things has not been going that well . . .” 3rd question: “Do you DESIRE your wife?” And that’s sort of what this Text is getting @. Chemistry AND Character.

1st step: PRAY. The hearts of some men towards their wives have grown cold. Same for wives and husbands. God by His grace can melt ice-cold hearts and soften hard hearts. Pray for your marriage. Pray for desire. Pray for wisdom. Pray for boldness + humility in dealing with whatever it is that’s poured water on the fire of romance. A marriage w/o romance is a SYMPTOM of a much deeper problem.

2nd step: REMEMBER what attracted you to each other to begin with. Recollect those times that you were both charmed by each other. [Carol & me coming out of Ceramis, my loading up with gum and being nervous enough to run my car up on a curve]. A couple, had NEVER kissed ANYONE before or

since but each other. He asked, “Am I the BEST KISSER you’ve ever known?” She replied, “Yes, and you are also the WORST kisser I’ve ever known!” Go back to where the romance began.

3rd step: UNDERSTAND. Get this firmly in your mind and heart. ROMANCE FOLLOWS LOVE. The woman in this text WANTS to be kissed B/C HE loves her, and she KNOWS He loves her. Men, is your wife CONVINCED of your love for her? If she’s not, then don’t get all bent out of shape if she doesn’t want to get romantic. Men are actually pretty oblivious to the obvious. No, speaking as one, men are VERY oblivious to the obvious! [Wife goes on a rant . . . by God’s providence. It took that for the man to get the message!]. MEN NOW HEAR THIS: Women ALWAYS see the ROMANTIC part of marriage IN THE TOTAL CONTEXT of marriage. For the ROMANTIC part of the marriage to go well, the PRACTICAL SIDE of the marriage also needs to be going well. An inattentive, unconcerned, critical man who wants to end a day of being . . . on a romantic note is, ok . . . a NUMBSKULL!

4. It’s time to look at your LOVE for CHRIST.

There’s a “reverse order three step dance” involved.

You should DESIRE Christ, not in a sensual way, but you should desire to be as close to Christ as possible, and you should delight to be in the presence of Him in whose presence is the very FULLNESS of Joy. There’s a THEMATIC connection between our physical marriages and our marriage to Jesus. In fact, in *Ephesians 5*, Paul makes that shift by just switching from one to the other. A good question to ask yourself to test your spiritual health is this: Do I DESIRE to be with Christ, is Jesus more beautiful and valuable than ANYTHING on this earth, or is Christ just for me more or less “fire insurance”? [Bernard of Clairvaux, “Jesus the very thought of Thee with sweetness fills my breast; but sweeter far Thy Face to see, and in Thy presence rest.”] NOTHING is, or should be, sweeter than your relationship with the Lord! His love is the ONLY consistent love you will ever experience in this world or in the world to come! If you don’t desire Christ more than anything else, you can get there, in reverse order.

1st UNDERSTAND: If you lose your desire for Christ, it’s NOT because He’s a bad husband. He loved you enough to DIE for you. Your lack of desire for a close personal relationship w/Christ is b/c of SIN. Jesus said, “If you LOVE me, you WILL keep my commandments.” [“My wife and I have been having difficulties lately; oh and by the way, I’m seeing another woman / really into porn.”] No WONDER that man was having difficulties. When you INDULGE in sin and are unwilling to CONFRONT sin, you are saying “I do NOT desire intimacy w/the Almighty”.

2nd, REMEMBER. Remember what Jesus has done for you to make you His Bride. [“ . . . and for her life He died . . . ”] This is what we do when we partake of the Lord’s Supper. Remember the great lengths the Almighty has gone to in order to bring you into a personal relationship with Him. God loves you enough to DIE for you. As R. C. Sproul used to say, “If that doesn’t light a fire in your heart for the Lord, your wood is wet!”

3rd, PRAY. Ultimately, GOD ALONE can make you SO AWARE of His love for you than you are moved in your heart to get as close & intimate w/God as a redeemed sinner can get. Pray 1 Peter 1:8. Pray Psalm 51:12. Or you may want to pray this song by Keith Green, “My Eyes Are Dry”: “My eyes are dry / my faith is old / my heart is hard / my prayers are cold. And I know how I ought to be / alive to you and dead to me. // But what can be done for and old heart like mine? Soften my heart with oil and wine. The oil is YOU, the Spirit of love / please . . . wash me anew with the wine of Your blood.”