



Series Overview and Guides

2026 ANNUAL VISION | SERIES 5

AUGUST-OCTOBER

Objective

what we hope to see God accomplish in us through this study

We love as God intends.

STATEMENTS OF THE OBJECTIVE

"...the beams of our house are cedars,
and our rafters are cypresses."

—Song of Solomon 1:17

"All of us are called to manifest divine love to others, especially to our spouses [with whom] we are intended to experience the fullness of joy made possible through love, sexual intimacy, and romance. Our standard is to be the love of God Himself... By yourself and in your own power, you cannot reach [that standard]. The good news is that you, as a Christian, can live a pleasing life because you are bound to the infinite Spirit of God... You can reside in faithfulness, purity, and holiness in all aspects of life."

—Tommy Nelson
The Book of Romance

Premise

why we are studying this

Christians are not immune to false and detrimental concepts about love. Our relationships are shot through with unfair and unvoiced expectations, unkind fighting, weak commitment, and lack of personal development. Whether currently married or not, we need the wisdom of God's Solomon love song to show us what romantic love should be. This text prepares us to fight for valuable, virtuous love in our lives and the lives of those around us.

STATEMENTS OF THE PREMISE

"Look! It is Solomon's portable couch! It is surrounded by sixty warriors, some of Israel's mightiest warriors. All of them are skilled with a sword, well-trained in the art of warfare. Each has his sword at his side, to guard against the terrors of the night."

—Song of Solomon 3:7-8 NET

"God created man and woman (Gen. 1:27; 2:20-23) and established and sanctioned marriage (Gen. 2:24). Since the world views sex so sordidly and perverts and exploits it so persistently and since so many marriages are crumbling because of lack of love, commitment, and devotion, it is advantageous to have a book in the Bible that gives God's endorsement of marital love as wholesome and pure."

—Jack Deere
"Song of Songs"
in *Bible Knowledge Commentary*

Theme

what the study is about

This book is all about godly romantic love, covering what we call dating and courtship, romance, wedding, the marriage bed, arguments, reconciliation, family relationships, and growing old together. Sadly, Songs has suffered much from its supposed friends as well as its enemies. The monogamous nature of the relationship has angered many over the centuries, incensing patriarchal and feminist cultures especially. The zealous passion has offended great numbers of prudes, especially Jewish and Christian readers. But the critics are missing the sweet beauty of this work where God shows the glory of two ever becoming one through marriage.

STATEMENTS OF THE THEME

"But from the beginning of creation *God made them male and female*. [Gen 1] *For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and the two will become one flesh*. [Gen 2] So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, let no one separate."

—Mark 10:6-9

"The message [of Song of Songs] is that the mutual pleasures of love are good and possible even in this fallen world. The Song is a testimony to the grace of God and a rejection of *both* asceticism and debauchery."

Duane Garrett,
"Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs"
in *New American Commentary*



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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SERIES 5 | SESSION 1

GROUP DISCUSSION



ANNUAL VISION 2026

VALUE

SCRIPTURE READING

Song of Songs 1:1-8

KEY IDEAS

THEME

The woman is smitten with Solomon. In fact, her infatuation allows her imagination to wander, a tendency not limited to any time or place. Her interaction with the chorus indicates a growing understanding of self and what she desires in a mate. Solomon appears somewhat clueless or possibly shrewdly deferential; likely a little of both, until his final words invite the relationship to move further.

LIFE CHANGE OBJECTIVE

We seek the best.

CHOOSE WISELY

"This opening soliloquy suggests that physical desire is a characteristic of romantic love and that properly channeled the desire is good, not evil. One ought to be 'intoxicated' with love for one's own mate (cf. Prov. 5:18-19), rather than with wine, drugs, or other people. However, the choice of a marriage partner should be based on far more than purely physical considerations. The beloved's speech indicates that the character of a person is vitally important in the selection of one's spouse."

—Jack Deere
in the *Bible Knowledge Commentary*

PRAYER

Pray for each other this week, that we see ourselves through the eyes of God.

Session 1: What Do You Seek?

1. Read Song of Songs 1:1-4. This passage is an expression of romantic desire.
 - What physical desires does the woman express?
 - A person's name represents their character and reputation (see 2 Samuel 7:9). What does the woman express about his name?
 - Why is the man's name integral to the woman's desire?
2. Read Song of Songs 1:5-6.
 - What do we learn about the woman from the way she describes herself and her circumstances?
 - What does it mean that she has "not taken care of my own vineyard."
 - What does this tell you about her self-awareness?
 - Why is it important to have a healthy understanding of self when entering a relationship?
3. Read Song of Songs 1:7-8.
 - How does the first question reveal the woman's desire for intimacy with the man?
 - In the time of Solomon, a veiled woman who appears at midday was a prostitute. What does the woman's next question reveal about her character?
4. What are the character traits you believe to be the most important to see manifested in a potential mate?
 - Are these qualities different from what you seek in a friend?
 - What qualities do you have to offer in a relationship?



SERIES 5 | SESSION 2

GROUP DISCUSSION



ANNUAL VISION 2026

VALUE

SCRIPTURE READING

Song of Songs 1:9-2:7

KEY IDEAS

THEME

Romantic love is thought of as hot for a reason. Increased capillary blood flow, racing thoughts, blushing beauty, sexual desire – each aspect of eros brings heat. Yet the couple here grants the example of wisdom. The heat is celebrated as good and natural, but it is restrained, channeled into proper time and place. Thus, the heat of romance is turned into an opportunity to better know each other. Sadly, our cultures have lost this magic. Trading restraint for unfettered appetite and character for copulation, we have lost the opportunity to grow in knowledge of the whole person.

LIFE CHANGE OBJECTIVE

We establish a culture of genuine engagement.

RESTRAINT

"As two people court, moving closer and closer to a decision about marriage, their passion should naturally grow. This is part of God's design, His plan, His purpose. [But] at no time in God's Word is sex apart from marriage considered honorable, right, or in keeping with God's plan. Is this message of restraint and marriage-only sex? It certainly is."

—Tommy Nelson
The Book of Romance

PRAYER

Pray for each other this week, that we build meaningful relationships.

Session 2: Getting to Know You

1. Read Song of Songs 1:9-15. The Pharaoh's mares were beautiful and precious possessions.
 - What do the man's words reveal about his feelings toward the woman? How do his words soothe her insecurity? (vv 9-10)
 - How did the woman respond to the man's words (vv 12-14), and the man to hers (v 15)?
 - What does their conversation reveal about how they are getting to know each other?
2. Read Song of Songs 1:16-17.
 - The woman extols the man's physical appearance as well as his personality. What does this say about her getting to know the man?
 - What do the images of the house, cedar beams, and cypress rafters communicate about the relationship the woman envisions?
3. Read Song of Songs 2:1-3. The woman compares herself to what are likely common meadow flowers.
 - What does this tell you about the woman's view of herself (v 1)?
 - How does the man respond to her self-evaluation (v 2)? What does this say about him getting to know the woman?
 - An apple tree in the forest would be rare, and its shade provides comfort. What does this suggest about how the man and woman respond to each other?
4. Read Song of Songs 2:4-7.
 - What do these verses reveal about the woman's desire for intimacy with the man?
 - What caution does the woman give to the daughters?
5. How can you effectively balance romance and restraint in a relationship?



SERIES 5 | SESSION 3

GROUP DISCUSSION



ANNUAL VISION 2026

VALUE

SCRIPTURE READING

Song of Songs 2:8-3:5

KEY IDEAS

THEME

The critical issue in biblical love is moving from me to we. This is true to some degree in family (storge) love, friendship (phileo), and sacrificial care (agape). But nowhere is this dynamic more important than in marriage (eros) love, where the two become one in God's hands. The love songs in this passage bring out the powerful passion that draws a couple together. Further, it positions the union as a natural thing, tied in with creation [See Genesis 1-2.] and thus subject to human oversight. That regency is exercised in management of timing lest the physical desires – presented here with beautiful, raw imagery in the original Hebrew – overwhelm the process of full-life unification. This is a tension nearly every lover has felt, and it is empowering to see that with God the human has agency. Men and women are not mere animals subject to passions.

LIFE CHANGE OBJECTIVE

Your Passion Is R.E.A.L. -Reserved-Exciting-Active-Loving

COURTSHIP

"Passion will grow naturally in courtship. But so must restraint. The Bible treats desire as normal, expected, and good. But there is a divine time and place for it."

—Tommy Nelson
The Book of Romance

PRAYER

Pray that we love with passion and purity.

Session 3: From Me to We

1. Read Song of Songs 2:8–14.
 - How does the woman describe the man as he approached her home (vv. 8-9)? What does this say about their eagerness to see each other?
 - Some scholars believe the man's words describe not just the physical setting but also his view of their relationship. What do his words suggest that he wants in their relationship?
2. Read Song of Songs 2:15. The couple recognizes that "little foxes" can ruin a vineyard that is just beginning to bloom.
 - What kinds of "little foxes" can damage a young relationship?
 - What does the phrase "catch the foxes for us" suggest about how problems should be addressed in a healthy relationship?
3. Read Song of Songs 2:16-17. The couple is moving from "Me to We."
 - What has changed or is changing in their relationship (v. 16a)?
 - These verses suggest a growing intensity in the woman's physical desires. Why would a deeper emotional commitment naturally intensify physical desire?
4. Read Song of Songs 3:1-4. The woman has a dream in which she loses the man she loves.
 - Is it natural to fear losing a loved one?
 - What does this dream sequence suggest about the depth of her love and commitment for the man?
5. Read Song of Songs 2:7 and 3:5. This is a recurring refrain of the Song.
 - What caution does the woman give to the daughters?
 - Why do you think Solomon repeats this refrain?



SERIES 5 | SESSION 4

GROUP DISCUSSION



ANNUAL VISION 2026

VALUE

SCRIPTURE READING

Song of Songs 3:6-11

KEY IDEAS

THEME

Wedding ceremonies are important. God created the idea and Songs 3 gives us a stunning example. Yet the importance is not found merely in the pomp; rather, it is the circumstance of *marriage* that makes the scene special. Our current zeitgeist is possibly too absorbed with images and ideas centered around the physical aspects of the wedding day. A culture negatively impacts the far more important marriage when it ignores or underplays the vows and other lifelong aspects of a wedding.

LIFE CHANGE OBJECTIVE

We stand by the sanctity of marriage.

SACRED MOMENT

"If you are thinking of your wedding as only a legal transition from being unmarried to being married, or as only a party in which you share your love with your friends, think again. Your wedding is a moment both partners should anticipate as a sacred moment. It is a moment in which God is fully present as the foremost witness to the wedding vows."

—Tommy Nelson
The Book of Romance

PRAYER

Pray for each other this week, that we embrace and defend the sacred meaning of wedding vows.

Session 4: Wedding Day

1. Read Song of Songs 3:6–8. The wedding procession is elaborate—fragrances, sixty warriors, an ornate carriage, a crown, and a public celebration.
 - What do all these preparations communicate about the significance of what is happening?
 - The pomp and grandeur were appropriate given the significance of the event. What is the difference between making **the wedding** important and recognizing that **marriage** is important?
2. The term "night" in Song of Songs (v. 8) may represent times when intimacy gives way to distance and longing (compare 3:1-2, 5:2-6).
 - What was the role of the mighty men (vv. 7-8)? Were they there to guard the bride and groom individually, or to guard the marriage?
 - What are some "things of the night" that we must guard against? Do you have people who surround you and guard your marriage?
3. Read Song of Songs 3:9–10. Solomon prepares the carriage with costly materials—Lebanon cedar, silver, gold, and purple fabric.
 - Solomon made the carriage himself (v. 9). What does his preparation for his bride tell us about his attitude toward marriage?
 - How should a person today prepare for marriage—spiritually, materially, relationally, and emotionally?
4. Read Song of Songs 3:11.
 - The crown of his mother indicates the marriage has her approval. Why is it important that parents approve of the marriage?
 - The wedding ended with a joyful King Solomon. What was the source of his gladness?



SERIES 5 | SESSION 5

GROUP DISCUSSION



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VALUE

SCRIPTURE READING

Song of Songs 4:1-5:1

KEY IDEAS

THEME

The marriage bed is intended by God to be a romantic celebration of the triunity composed of God-wife-husband. There is no shame in it; instead, it is a worshipful glory ordained by God for pleasure.

LIFE CHANGE OBJECTIVE

We honor the marriage bed.

A SOURCE OF PLEASURE

"When sexual intimacy occurs in right timing and with the right person, from God's perspective, it is meant to be enjoyed fully. Sex under an alias—in a dark corner, a backseat, or a motel, with a person other than your spouse—is never sex that can be enjoyed to the maximum because there will always be an element of guilt and shame associated with it... Once you are with your beloved, however, and within the vows of holy matrimony, sex is meant to be a source of pleasure for both the man and the woman. There should be no sense of shame or guilt. Obviously, that was the case for Solomon and his bride. They were enjoying each other immensely."

—Tommy Nelson
The Book of Romance

PRAYER

Pray for each other this week, that we enjoy God's gift of intimacy in the context of marriage.

Session 5: Drink Deeply

1. Read Song of Songs 4:1–7. Solomon spends considerable time discovering his bride and telling her what he finds beautiful about her.
 - Solomon begins with her eyes and slowly moves down her body. What does this progression tell you about his attitude toward his wife?
 - His bride appears to be smiling (he describes her teeth in v. 2). What does this tell you about her response to Solomon?
 - What can we learn from Solomon about the importance of making the person we love feel seen, valued, and desirable?
2. Read Song of Songs 4:8–11. Solomon invites his bride to leave her home and her fears behind and be with him (v. 8).
 - What does verse 9 suggest about his anticipation of her response?
 - Verses 10–11 describe a passionate kiss. Why was Solomon's invitation so compelling to her?
3. Read Song of Songs 4:12–16. Solomon and his bride celebrate their wedding.
 - Solomon describes his bride as a virgin—a "locked garden," a "sealed spring" (v. 15). What does this tell you about the couple's view of the marriage bed? Why was this important to them?
 - As the marriage is consummated, Solomon describes his bride as valuable and desirable (vv. 13–15). What did Solomon value about his bride? How does their relationship change?
 - How did the bride respond to Solomon's affirmation (v. 16)? How does her response compare with her previous statements in 2:7 and 3:5?
4. Read Song of Songs 5:1. Solomon declares the marriage is complete, and that he has enjoyed his garden, his bride.
 - How does this verse, and this passage, inform our understanding of marital intimacy?
 - The last phrase ("Eat, drink...") is often attributed to God. What does this tell you about God's view of marital intimacy?



SERIES 5 | SESSION 6

GROUP DISCUSSION



ANNUAL VISION 2026

VALUE

SCRIPTURE READING

Song of Songs 5:2-6:3

KEY IDEAS

THEME

As with their temptations pre-marriage, this grave misunderstanding occurs at night. Darkness metaphorically represents all that would tear the couple apart. Like all humans, the wife's dream reflects the subtle concerns of her heart. Her response is to appreciate the blessings God has granted.

LIFE CHANGE OBJECTIVE

We put connection over convenience.

A NEW LIGHT

"The woman began to dwell on all of the wonderful aspects of her husband, those things that set him apart from other men and made him so special to her..."

The woman is a fine example of what God does in transforming a person's attitude. First, she began to see things in a new light. She began to see the good that had escaped her before. *She sees her mate as God sees her mate!* When that happens, compassion rises in her heart. And in the wake of compassion, she feels a desire for renewed intimacy and closeness of communication."

—Tommy Nelson
The Book of Romance

PRAYER

Pray for each other this week, that we see out mates as God sees them.

Session 6: The Terrors of the Night

1. Read Song of Songs 5:2–6. In the woman's dream, her husband comes seeking connection, but she initially responds, essentially, "I'm already in bed."
 - What seemingly small choices created distance between them?
 - How does the husband respond when she doesn't open the door? What *doesn't* he do?
 - Why is it sometimes easiest to neglect the relationships that matter most to us?
2. Read Song of Songs 5:6–8. Once the woman realizes that something has gone wrong, she doesn't simply wait for him to return—she gets up and searches for him.
 - What does her response teach us about taking responsibility for repairing a damaged relationship?
 - Why is it difficult to take the first step toward reconciliation, especially when we believe the other person also bears some responsibility?
3. Read Song of Songs 5:9–16. The young women ask what makes her beloved so special; she responds by remembering everything she values about him.
 - What are some of the virtues the woman describes in this passage?
 - How might deliberately remembering what we value in someone change the way we respond during conflict?
4. Read Song of Songs 6:1–3. The young women ask where her beloved has gone.
 - How did the woman know exactly where to find her husband? What does this tell us about his character?
 - Compare the anxiety of 5:6 with the confidence of 6:3. What changed over the course of this passage?
5. How difficult is it for you to respond with love after you have been hurt? From where do you draw your strength and courage not to retaliate or seek revenge?



SERIES 5 | SESSION 7

GROUP DISCUSSION



ANNUAL VISION 2026

VALUE

SCRIPTURE READING

Song of Songs 6:4-7:10

KEY IDEAS

THEME

The maturation of the couple is marvelous to behold, like observing the opening scenes of the film UP! where the beauty of growing old together is richly depicted.

LIFE CHANGE OBJECTIVE

We grow up well in God's love.

LOVE GROWS

"At the beginning of their marriage, Solomon was attracted to the beauty and intrigue and bloom of his young bride as well as to her potential. At the later stage of their marriage, Solomon was no less attracted, but he was attracted to different things: his wife's stateliness and fruitfulness to his life. The younger groom Solomon was eager for what his wife would give him. The older husband Solomon was grateful and appreciative for all that his wife gave him. Of all the people on earth, he most longed to come to her. A man told me, 'My home is wherever my wife happens to be at the time.' That was how Solomon felt. His wife was his place of refuge and pleasure."

—Tommy Nelson
The Book of Romance

PRAYER

Pray for each other this week, that we faithfully cultivate love in our marriages.

Session 7: Growing Together

1. Read Song of Songs 6:4–10 and 4:1–7.

- Compare Solomon's description of his wife in Chapter 6 with the way he described her on their wedding night in Chapter 4. What similarities do you notice?
- Why is that repetition important considering the conflict the couple experienced in Chapter 5?
- Solomon describes his wife as unique; she is "the only one" (v. 6:9). What does that communicate to her about her place in his life?

2. Read Song of Songs 6:11–13. The woman searched the garden for fresh evidence of their love and found it to be flourishing.

- What might this imagery suggest about a relationship becoming fruitful again after difficulty?
- How can working through conflict actually produce greater maturity and closeness?

3. Read Song of Songs 7:1–9. Compare Solomon's praise of his wife with previous passages in 6:4–10 and 4:1–7.

- In what ways has Solomon's attraction to his wife changed? What has remained constant? (*See also the Nelson quote in the sidebar.*)
- What do these similarities and differences tell us about love as a relationship matures?

4. Read Song of Songs 7:10. See also 2:16 and 6:3.

- Through courtship, marriage, intimacy, conflict, and reconciliation, what has remained constant in their relationship? How has their love matured?
- What is the difference between *staying* together and *growing* together?

