

## **BEGINNING OF LOVE**

**Song of Songs 1:1-2:7**

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Somewhere between grades six and nine we see a change occurring with boys and girls. They begin to be attracted to each other. Previously a boy wouldn't dare hang out with a girl. Now he sees the girl differently. For some reason he hasn't worked out, he likes her more than other girls and would like to spend time with her. That's the God-designed power of attraction. It has been defined as the 'natural feeling of being drawn to other individuals and desiring their company.' We can't always explain why it is. We can be in a room full of people yet find ourselves attracted to one particular person. It seems they have a certain something we can't always define. Often, we call it 'chemistry'. This concept of attraction is what we find here in our text.

We have here the words of a young woman very attracted to king Solomon. We don't know who she was. She is an unknown in the palace. She was a country girl who worked on her family's farm. (Song of Songs 1:6) *"Do not stare at me because I am dark, because I am darkened by the sun. My mother's sons were angry with me and made me take care of the vineyard"*. She felt out of place at the palace. *"I am dark, yet lovely, O daughters of Jerusalem, dark like the tents of Kedar, like the curtains of Solomon."* Kedar was in the desert and the reference is to the Bedouin tents made of black goat skin. The beautiful women of the place, the 'daughters of Jerusalem' had soft, pale skin. They carefully looked after themselves and were always sheltered from the sun. They had all their beauty aids and make up. The women who went into the harem of the kings in those days usually had twelve months of beauty treatment. But the woman in our song had not looked after herself. She says (Song of Songs 1:6) *"My own vineyard I have neglected."* She had a deeply tanned appearance because her brothers made her work out in the sun all day. She is under the authority of her brothers because it seems there is no father. In Middle East tradition a woman, before she was married, was always under the authority of a male, her father or brothers. Our young woman feels inferior. She comes on the scene with no name and no fame. She is not part of the in scene of the palace. She felt at a disadvantage to have Solomon notice her.

She is also different in another way. For her love is not a game. She cares nothing for the intrigues at the royal court. She does not use clever flirtation. She has no refined manner to attract the attention of the king. She is very straightforward in her

approach. She has her heart set on Solomon and openly admits it. (Song of Songs 1:2) *"Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth- for your love is more delightful than wine"*. She dreams of what it would be like to be kissed by him. She already longs for the king to embrace her. But notice something. She longs for Solomon, not just because he is good looking. Yes, he is handsome with a delightful aftershave (Song of Songs 1:3) *"Pleasing is the fragrance of your perfume."* Men wore a lot more 'perfume' or fragrance in those days. With a of a lack of water there was not a lot of opportunity for a good wash. She loves his smell, the fragrance of his perfume. But there is more than attracts her. (Song of songs 1:3b) *"...your name is like perfume poured out."* That's significant. In the Hebrew culture a name was not just a label. Rather it was an indication of the person's character and reputation. Solomon's reputation was outstanding. Even the Queens of Sheba came all the way to Jerusalem to hear his wisdom. It was God who had given Solomon his wisdom. So, his 'name' had much to do with God. He was a man 'blessed of God'. And in the eyes of this young woman this is very important. As she says, (Song of Songs 1:3) *"No wonder the maidens love you."* This is not like the TV adverts where the women chase a man because of the aftershave he wears. It's the fragrance of his name that makes the heads turn. He has character, wisdom and standing in the community. So, the woman's attraction to Solomon was due to his 'good looks'. Yes! But even more to his character. To his faith. This is important for our young people. We are aware that there is often a strong physical attraction. 'She gorgeous!' 'What a hunk!' But when looking for a life partner we should be looking at their character, their faith.

Often strong physical attraction can set off a real sense of desire. We see as the woman says (Song of Songs 1:4) *"Take me away with you-let us hurry. Let the king bring me into his chambers."* Her dreaming takes her way beyond what the relationship is. The fantasy fades away to reality. You can see the dilemma the woman has. She is a sunburnt farmgirl. He is a handsome, famous king. How is she ever going to get Solomon to notice her? As she says (Song of Songs 1:7) *"Tell me, you whom I love, where you graze your flock and where you rest your sheep at midday. Why should I be like a veiled woman beside the flocks of your friends?"* The woman is talking to herself. She uses the imagery of shepherds. She wonders what she and Solomon have in common. Where can she meet him? One thing she will not do is flaunt herself. She will not cheapen herself and lure him like a 'veiled woman', a prostitute. She wants to be received for who she is as a person. Not just for her body. There is another good lesson in that.

But really, she doesn't have to worry. We see that she has already been noticed. Solomon says (Song of Songs 1:8), *"If you do not know, most beautiful of women, follow the tracks of the sheep and graze your young goats by the tends of the shepherds."* Here we

get the first hint as to how he feels about her. They have not met yet. But he has already noticed her. She is in his eyes 'the most beautiful of women.' She does not have to do anything to get his attention. She just has to go on being who she is. Just come as you are 'and graze your young goats by the tens of the shepherds.' She has already got his attention. Solomon has already noticed how special she is and is attracted as well. (Song of Songs 1:9) *"I liken you, my darling, to a mare harnessed to one of the chariots of Pharaoh"*. That may not seem much of a compliment in our ears. But remember Solomon was very keen on horses. He had over twelve thousand of them. The Egyptian horses were beautiful horses. Especially when harnessed with all the colours of the harness and chariot. If there was a mare amongst these glorious war horses, those stallions, it would cause havoc. So, we could say that Solomon is saying, in his view, the woman is so beautiful that when she walks into a room, she causes all the heads to turn. She causes a stir. Especially when her beauty is enhanced with jewelry (Song of Songs 1:10-11) *"Your cheeks are beautiful with earrings, your neck with strings of jewels. We will make you earrings of gold, studded with silver."* She has caught his eye because she is different. She stands out. Not only her natural beauty but her open character.

But the woman doesn't know this yet. She is still pining for him. (Song of Songs 1:12-14) *"While the king was at his table, my perfume spread its fragrance. My beloved is to me a sachet of myrrh resting between my breasts. My beloved is to me a cluster of henna blossoms from the vineyards of En Gedi"*. The 'sachet of myrrh' was the equivalent of our personal deodorant. It was a little sachet containing herbs and blossoms worn around the neck. She is describing the finest fragrance: 'myrrh' with 'henna blossoms from En Gedi'. That was an oasis in a small deep valley south of the Dead Sea. In a hot dry land, it was lush with growth. Wonderful plants grew there. So, the woman is saying just as this most wonderful fragrance is always with her, so her mind is always on this man. That is how it is. Those we truly love are always on our mind. Especially when we are first in love we can't get them off our minds.

And then it happens. These two who have been longing for each other meet up. Solomon comes and speaks to her heart. (Song of Songs 1:15) *"How beautiful you are my darling! Oh, how beautiful. Your eyes are like doves"*. Dove eyes are an iridescent pearl grey with speckled flecks. She responds (Song of Songs 1:16) *"How handsome you are my lover! Oh, how charming!"* They meet outdoors, because she says, *"And our bed is verdant"*. In other words, it's covered with grass. And he replies (Song of Songs 1:17) *"The beams of our house are cedars, our rafters are firs."* So, we can imagine they are strolling in the garden and in their feelings of love the world of nature has become their house. That is the effect of being in love. The world seems theirs, and the birds in the trees sing just for them. There are numerous references to spring in the song.

Everything seems fresh and new. So it often is for those who find love. Our attitude to life changes when we experience acceptance and love.

Our attitude towards ourselves changes too. Notice how the woman sees herself. (2:1) *"I am a rose of Sharon, a lily of the valleys."* The unconfident, shy country girl sees herself as nothing special. She is a common flower in the marsh area of the Sharon Valley. But her man turns that into a compliment. If she is a lily all the other women are thorns. (Song of Songs 2:2) *"Like a lily among the thorns is my darling among the maidens."* And because of Solomon's acceptance and compliments she accepts herself and sees her own beauty. That is the wonder of loving relationships. We find our own potential and grow. That's because we see the value in each other and give encouragement. Solomon sees the uniqueness of this woman and compliments her. And she sees his strength. (Song of Songs 2:3) *"Like an apple tree among the trees of the forest is my lover among the young men."* She sees him as being distinct. All the other men are but trees. But he is an apple tree, with such delicious fruit. Thinking of a tree reminds us of Psalm 1. There the 'godly man' is compared with a 'tree planted by the river'. The tree was symbolic of someone who is steady. The man has faith and character. He is sweet and delightful, like the delicious apples. She enjoys his company and personality. *"I delight to sit in his shade and his fruit is sweet to my taste."* Sitting in his shade means she longs for the man to be her security and strength.

The two of them are very attracted and desire intimacy. She says (Song of Songs 2:4) *"He has taken me to the banquet hall and his banner over me is love."* A banner is a way of saying 'Here is what we stand for'. It was a rallying point for soldiers in battle reminding them to make a stand for their country. So, the man is making clear his intent. He is declaring his love for the woman. And what he stands for is love, selfless, sacrificial, spiritual love. The other way of translating the word is 'his glance towards me was intent on love' which brings out a similar idea. The two of them are strongly attracted to each other, even passionately. The woman says (Song of Songs 2:5-7) *"Strengthen me with raisins, refresh me with apples, for I am faint with love. His left arm is under my head and his right arm embraces me"*. The woman is head over heels for Solomon. She is faint with love. She has a strong desire for sexually intimacy. But, she holds back. Because she knows there is a proper place for these things. And that is in marriage. That's what it means when she says, (Song of Songs 2:7) *"Daughters of Jerusalem, I charge you by the gazelles and does of the field, do not arouse or awaken love until it so desires."* The reference to the 'gazelles' and 'does' is a tough one. Why make an oath by them? The best we can say is that the Hebrew word for 'gazelle' sounds like the Hebrew for 'LORD of Hosts'. And the Hebrew for 'does of the field' sounds like the Hebrew for 'God Almighty'. So, we can translate what she says as 'Before God do not start love making

until it is appropriate'. In other words, do it God's way at the time and place he has set for it. The woman openly admits she has very strong desires for her man. And that desire is legitimate. Sexual intimacy is a God given expression of love. But its place is in marriage.

Marriage in the Bible is a constant theme to express God's love for his people. It expresses Christ's devotion to the church. As we think through the Gospel story we think again: what was the church that Christ, the king of kings should be attracted to her. We were not only dark, but ugly with sin. And what are we ugly sinners in comparison to the glory of the angels. Yet, to what angels did God ever say (Isaiah 62:5) *"As the bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so will your God rejoice over you"*. By Jesus' loving sacrifice we have been made (Ephesians 5:27) *"a radiant Church without...blemish"*. Christ by his love helps us find our true selves, forgiven, loved, with true joy in life. Having Jesus, we say with the psalmist (Psalm 73:25) *"Whom have I in heaven but you. And earth has nothing I desire besides you"*. Being attracted deeply to another is part of God's way. The question is, is the way we are relating an example of the love between Jesus and the church. Then we know we are doing it right.