

The Song of Solomon, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 1: The Bride's Longing and the Lovers' First Words

Song of Solomon 1:1-2:7

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

What is doctrinally at stake in this opening lesson is nothing less than the goodness of God's creation and the dignity of His design for marriage. The Song of Solomon stands as God's own testimony that married love between one man and one woman is not a concession or an embarrassment, but a gift to be celebrated. In a culture that has both cheapened love into mere appetite and despised the boundaries God set around it, the teacher must help students recover a high and holy view of the very thing the world has dragged through the mud. We affirm that God made us male and female in His image (Genesis 1:27), that marriage is the lifelong, exclusive, one-flesh union He ordained (Genesis 2:24), and that the Scriptures of the Old Testament were written for our instruction (Romans 15:4). This book is not a museum piece. It speaks.

The lesson also aims squarely at the spiritual formation of the student. It would be possible to teach this passage as mere poetry appreciation, but that would miss the point. The bride's longing presses us to ask where our own desires are aimed. Her honesty about her neglected vineyard presses us to examine what we have left untended. The refrain about not awakening love before its time confronts a generation taught to follow every feeling, and calls instead for patience, purity, and self-control, fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23). The teacher should guide students past the question "what does this mean" to the deeper question "what is God forming in me."

Finally, handle the book with reverence and restraint. The class will likely include a wide range of ages and life stages. Let the text say what it plainly says about the joy of married love, neither allegorizing it into a code that hides its meaning nor handling it crudely. Where the New Testament invites it, especially Ephesians 5, lift the students' eyes to Christ and His church, for the love that God designed in Eden was always meant to whisper of a greater love still.

Question 1

Student Question:

The book opens by calling itself "the song of songs, which is Solomon's" (1:1). What does this superscription claim about the worth of the book, and why would God devote an inspired book to the celebration of married love?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The very first words of the book make an extraordinary claim. The Hebrew expression rendered “the song of songs” is a superlative, the same kind of construction as “holy of holies” or “King of kings.” It means the best, the highest, the supreme song. Of all the songs Solomon is said to have composed, a thousand and five according to 1 Kings 4:32, this is the crown. The Spirit of God did not bury this book in the canon by accident. He set a banner over it and called it the finest.

That should arrest us. We sometimes imagine that the spiritual life and the bodily, married life of a man and woman occupy separate rooms, that God cares about the one and merely tolerates the other. The superscription refuses that division. God devotes an entire inspired book, and calls it His best song, to the celebration of love between a husband and wife. This is the God who in Genesis looked at His creation and called it good, and who looked at the union of man and woman and called it very good indeed.

The attribution “which is Solomon’s” anchors the book in real history, in the reign of Israel’s wisest king. Whether Solomon wrote it, or it was written for him, or in his honor, the point stands that this is no anonymous fragment. It belongs to the wisdom tradition of Israel, alongside Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, books that teach us how to live well under God. The Song teaches us how to love well.

For the church, the lesson is that we need not be embarrassed by what God has honored. We are sometimes tempted to fall silent about marriage and married love, leaving the world to do all the talking, and the world speaks of it cheaply. But God speaks of it beautifully. Romans 15:4 reminds us that whatsoever was written aforetime was written for our learning. This song was written for us, that we might learn to treasure what God treasures.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The inspiration and authority of all Scripture, including the poetic and wisdom books (2 Timothy 3:16–17)
- The superlative title affirms the worth God places on married love
- Marriage and the body are part of God’s good creation, not a lesser concern
- The Old Testament written for our learning (Romans 15:4)
- Guarding against both prudishness and crudeness in how the church speaks of love

Discussion Prompts

- Why do you think God chose to include a love song in His Word, and what does that tell us about Him?
- How does the church sometimes fall silent about marriage, and what is lost when it does?
- What does it mean that this is called the “song of songs,” the best of all songs?

Question 2

Student Question:

The bride begins not with restraint but with open longing, “Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth” (1:2). When you examine your own desires, are they aimed where God designed them to be, and what would it mean for you to long rightly?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The bride does not ease into the book. She bursts onto the page with longing, “Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth: for thy love is better than wine” (1:2). There is nothing timid here. She desires her beloved openly, and the text does not scold her for it. Her longing is pure, not because longing is always pure, but because hers is rightly aimed, set upon the one to whom she belongs.

This is worth pausing over, because desire is one of the most powerful forces in the human heart, and one of the most easily misdirected. The same longing that, rightly aimed, builds a marriage and binds two lives together can, wrongly aimed, wreck a life. The problem in our hearts is rarely that we desire too much. Often it is that we desire the wrong things, or the right things in the wrong way, or at the wrong time. The bride shows us desire aimed where God designed it.

“Thy love is better than wine,” she says. Wine in Scripture is a picture of joy and celebration, of the good gifts that gladden the heart. Yet she says her beloved’s love surpasses even that. The best earthly pleasures are real, but love rightly given is better still. The wise heart learns to rank its loves, to want most what is most worth wanting.

Examine your own longings. We are all longing creatures, made with desires that ache to be filled. The question is never whether you will long, but for what. The honest believer brings even desire to God and asks Him to teach the heart to want rightly. As Psalm 37:4 says, “Delight thyself also in the Lord; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart.” When our delight is set on Him, He reshapes our wanting from the inside out.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Desire is a God-given gift to be rightly aimed, not merely suppressed
- The difference between pure longing and disordered desire
- Bringing our desires under the lordship of Christ
- Delighting in the Lord reshapes what we want (Psalm 37:4)
- The danger of right desires pursued in the wrong way or at the wrong time

Discussion Prompts

- Where have you seen good desires aimed in the wrong direction cause harm?
- What does it look like, practically, to bring your desires to God?
- How can delighting in the Lord change not just what you do but what you want?

Question 3

Student Question:

The bride says, "I am black, but comely, O ye daughters of Jerusalem" (1:5), honest about her flaws yet secure in her beloved's love. What does this passage teach about how God sees us and how we are to see ourselves in the light of love?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

"I am black, but comely, O ye daughters of Jerusalem," the bride says (1:5). She is darkened by the sun, weathered by the outdoor labor her family forced upon her, as the next verse explains. By the standards of the pampered city women, the daughters of Jerusalem, she might seem unlovely. Yet she does not crumble under their gaze. She says, in effect, I am weathered, yes, but I am beautiful. She is honest about her flaws and secure in love at the same time.

This is a rare and precious thing. Most of us swing between two errors. Either we deny our flaws and pretend to a perfection we do not have, or we are crushed by them and cannot believe we could be loved. The bride does neither. She names the truth about herself plainly, and she rests in her beloved's love anyway. Her security does not come from pretending she is flawless. It comes from being loved.

Here is where the Song begins to lift our eyes higher. The love that secures the bride is a picture of a greater love. The believer can say something far more astonishing than "I am black, but comely." We can say, I am a sinner saved by grace, flawed and yet beloved, not because I have hidden my faults from God but because Christ has covered them. "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8).

Be careful here to keep the church's doctrine straight. We are not born guilty of someone else's sin. Ezekiel 18:20 is plain that "the soul that sinneth, it shall die" and that the son does not bear the iniquity of the father. We become guilty when we ourselves sin. But every accountable person does sin (Romans 3:23), and so every one of us stands in need of the love that covers, the love offered in Christ and received in obedient faith. The bride's security in being loved is a faint and beautiful echo of the security the forgiven sinner finds in Christ.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Honesty about our flaws held together with security in being loved
- We become guilty when we ourselves sin, not by inherited guilt (Ezekiel 18:20)
- All accountable persons sin and need grace (Romans 3:23; Romans 5:8)
- God's love is not earned by hiding our faults but received in Christ
- Healthy self-regard grounded in being loved, not in pretended perfection

Discussion Prompts

- Which error do you lean toward, denying your flaws or being crushed by them?
- How does being loved by God change the way you see yourself?

- What is the difference between covering your faults from others and confessing them to God?

Question 4

Student Question:

The bride admits, “they made me the keeper of the vineyards; but mine own vineyard have I not kept” (1:6). What is the “vineyard” you have neglected while tending everyone else’s, and what would faithful keeping look like this week?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The bride explains her weathered appearance, “my mother’s children were angry with me; they made me the keeper of the vineyards; but mine own vineyard have I not kept” (1:6). She was put to work tending the family’s vineyards, laboring under the sun for others, and in the process her own vineyard, her own self, went neglected. There is a quiet ache in those words that many a faithful servant will recognize.

It is possible to be so busy keeping everyone else’s vineyard that you let your own go to ruin. The mother who pours herself out for her children and forgets her own walk with God. The elder or preacher who tends the whole flock and lets his own soul grow dry. The friend who carries everyone’s burdens and never tends his own heart. Service is good, even commanded, but it can become a hiding place from the harder work of keeping our own vineyard.

What is your vineyard? It is the inner life God has given you to tend, your own heart before Him, your own walk, your own marriage, your own relationship with the Lord. Jesus warned that a man could gain the whole world and lose his own soul (Mark 8:36). It is possible to win at serving and lose at the very thing service was meant to flow from.

The remedy is not to stop serving. It is to put first things first. “But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness” (Matthew 6:33). When we keep our own vineyard, when we tend our walk with God, we actually have more to give others, not less. The neglected vineyard eventually fails the very people it was sacrificed for. Faithful keeping begins at home, in the heart, before the Lord.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The danger of neglecting our own soul while serving others
- Service must flow from a tended inner life, not replace it
- Keeping our own vineyard means guarding our walk with God (Mark 8:36)
- Seeking first the kingdom orders all other labors (Matthew 6:33)
- Self-examination as an act of faithfulness, not selfishness

Discussion Prompts

- What “vineyard” of your own have you been neglecting lately?
- How can serving others become a way of avoiding your own walk with God?
- What is one concrete step to begin keeping your own vineyard this week?

Question 5

Student Question:

The lovers exchange their first words of praise, the beloved calling her fair and the bride calling him pleasant (1:15–16). What does this mutual delight reveal about God’s design for the way a husband and wife are to honor one another?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Now comes the first exchange of praise. The beloved says, “Behold, thou art fair, my love; behold, thou art fair; thou hast doves’ eyes” (1:15). The bride answers, “Behold, thou art fair, my beloved, yea, pleasant” (1:16). Notice the mutuality. He praises her, and she praises him. Neither is silent. Neither takes the other for granted. Their delight in one another is spoken aloud.

This is God’s design for marriage on display. A husband and wife are to honor one another, to see the beauty in each other, and to say so. Too many marriages grow cold not because love has died but because it has gone unspoken. The beloved does not merely think his bride is fair, he tells her, twice, “thou art fair, my love.” Words of honor are not flattery, they are the lifeblood of a tender marriage.

Observe also that the praise flows both directions. Scripture honors the dignity of both husband and wife, made together in the image of God (Genesis 1:27). The husband is to love his wife as Christ loved the church (Ephesians 5:25). The wife is to respect and honor her husband (Ephesians 5:33). The Song shows this honoring as a delight, not a duty grudgingly performed. Each beholds the other and is glad.

There is a lesson here for every relationship, but especially for marriage. When did you last tell your spouse, or your brother or sister in Christ, what you genuinely admire in them? We are quick to point out faults and slow to speak praise. The lovers in the Song teach us to behold the good in one another and to name it out loud. “Pleasant words are as an honeycomb, sweet to the soul, and health to the bones” (Proverbs 16:24).

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God’s design for mutual honor and delight in marriage
- Both husband and wife made in God’s image with equal dignity (Genesis 1:27)
- Love must be spoken, not merely felt (Ephesians 5:25, 33)
- The power of words of honor to sustain a relationship (Proverbs 16:24)
- Beholding and naming the good in one another

Discussion Prompts

- When did you last speak genuine praise to your spouse or a fellow Christian?
- Why is it so easy to notice faults and so hard to voice admiration?
- How does mutual honor reflect the way Christ and the church relate?

Question 6

Student Question:

The bride longs to know where her beloved feeds his flock at noon (1:7), unwilling to wander among strangers. In your walk with God, are you seeking the Shepherd Himself, or drifting among substitutes, and how do you find Him?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The bride turns and seeks her beloved, "Tell me, O thou whom my soul loveth, where thou feedest, where thou makest thy flock to rest at noon: for why should I be as one that turneth aside by the flocks of thy companions?" (1:7). She wants to be with him, not wandering uncertainly among strangers. She seeks the one her soul loves, and she will not settle for anyone less.

There is a holy single-mindedness here. She is not content to be near his companions, near the right crowd, near the edges of his world. She wants him. And she names him beautifully, "thou whom my soul loveth." That phrase reaches past mere attraction into the depths of the person. She loves him with her soul.

This longing to seek and find the beloved is one of the places the Song quietly lifts our eyes toward God. The believer's deepest cry is to know the Lord, not merely to hover at the edges of religious activity, but to seek Him Himself. "As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God" (Psalm 42:1). It is possible to be busy among the flocks of His companions, busy with church things, and still miss the Shepherd Himself.

Where are you seeking? Many drift among substitutes, looking for rest and satisfaction in things that cannot give it, turning aside here and there, never quite finding home. The bride shows the better way, to seek the one her soul loves and refuse all counterfeits. "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near" (Isaiah 55:6). The Shepherd is not hiding. He is found by those who seek Him with the whole heart.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Seeking the beloved himself, not merely his company or his crowd
- The danger of religious activity that misses the Lord Himself
- The soul's deep longing for God (Psalm 42:1)
- Refusing substitutes and counterfeits for true communion

- Seeking the Lord while He may be found (Isaiah 55:6)

Discussion Prompts

- Are you seeking the Lord Himself, or just staying busy near the edges of His work?
- What substitutes do people turn aside to instead of seeking God directly?
- What does it mean to love God with your soul, not just your activity?

Question 7

Student Question:

The bride declares, “I am the rose of Sharon, and the lily of the valleys” (2:1), and the beloved answers by calling her a lily among thorns (2:2). What does this picture teach about being set apart, and how does it echo God’s call for His people to be holy?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

“I am the rose of Sharon, and the lily of the valleys,” the bride says (2:1), and the beloved answers, “As the lily among thorns, so is my love among the daughters” (2:2). She names herself a simple wildflower, perhaps with a touch of modesty, and he responds by setting her apart from all others. Among all the thorns, she alone is the lily. In his eyes she is uniquely beautiful, distinct, chosen.

This picture of being set apart speaks to a deep truth. Love, by its nature, is particular. The beloved does not say she is one lily among many lilies. He says she is a lily among thorns. To love truly is to set one apart from all others, to say, of all the world, you are the one. This is the exclusive devotion at the heart of marriage, the forsaking of all others, the cleaving to one.

Here the Song reaches toward a great biblical theme, the call of God’s people to be set apart, to be holy. The word holy means set apart, distinct, belonging especially to God. “Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people” (1 Peter 2:9). As the lily stands out among thorns, so the people of God are called to stand out among the world, not by harshness but by the beauty of holiness.

There is comfort here too. The beloved sees beauty where others might see only an ordinary flower. So God sees His people, not as the world sees them, but as precious, chosen, set apart for Himself. The church, the bride of Christ, is being made ready, “that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish” (Ephesians 5:27). To be loved by God is to be set apart by Him for Himself.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Love is particular, setting one apart from all others
- Exclusive devotion at the heart of marriage, forsaking all others

- God's call to be holy, set apart as His own (1 Peter 2:9)
- The church as the bride being made ready for Christ (Ephesians 5:27)
- Being seen as precious by the One who loves us

Discussion Prompts

- What does it mean that love sets one apart from all others?
- How are God's people called to stand out from the world like a lily among thorns?
- How does it change you to know God sees you as precious and chosen?

Question 8

Student Question:

The bride rests under her beloved's care and says, "his banner over me was love" (2:4). What banner is flying over your life right now, and what would change if you truly rested under the banner of God's love?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The bride is brought into a place of feasting and rest, and she says one of the loveliest lines in all of Scripture, "He brought me to the banqueting house, and his banner over me was love" (2:4). A banner was a standard raised over an army or a household, declaring whose it was and under whose protection it stood. Over the bride flies a single banner, and its name is love.

Consider what it means to live under a banner of love. The bride is not anxious here. She is not striving to earn her place or fearful of being cast out. She rests in the banqueting house, safe under the standard of her beloved's love. So she says in the next verses that his hand upholds her and she leans into his care. To be under the banner of love is to be secure, provided for, and at peace.

Now lift your eyes. What banner flies over your life? For many, the banner overhead reads fear, or performance, or shame, or self-reliance. We live as though everything depends on us, as though love must be earned and could at any moment be withdrawn. But the gospel raises a different banner. "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (1 John 4:10).

To rest under the banner of God's love does not mean we are passive or careless. The bride still seeks, still serves, still waits. But she does it all from a place of security, knowing she is loved. The believer who has obeyed the gospel, who has been baptized into Christ (Romans 6:3-4), lives under that banner, and is called to remain faithful under it to the end (Revelation 2:10). The banner over you can read love. What would change if you truly believed it?

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Resting in love rather than striving to earn it

- The banner that flies over a life, fear and performance versus love
- God's love demonstrated in sending His Son (1 John 4:10)
- The believer's security in Christ through obedient faith (Romans 6:3-4)
- Faithfulness maintained from a place of being loved (Revelation 2:10)

Discussion Prompts

- What banner currently flies over your daily life, and what does it read?
- How does living under a banner of love differ from living under fear or performance?
- What would change in you this week if you rested in being loved by God?

Question 9

Student Question:

Three times in this book, beginning here in 2:7, comes the charge, "that ye stir not up, nor awake my love, till he please." What is the wisdom of God in this refrain about not awakening love before its time, and what does it teach about purity, patience, and self-control?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Now we reach the refrain that will echo three times through this book, here in its first appearance, "I charge you, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, by the roes, and by the hinds of the field, that ye stir not up, nor awake my love, till he please" (2:7). It is a solemn charge, an oath even, and it carries the weight of hard-won wisdom. Do not stir up love, do not awaken it, until the proper time.

Love, the Song teaches, is powerful, and powerful things must be handled with care. Later the book will say that love is strong as death and its flame a most vehement flame (8:6). A fire in the hearth warms the house. The same fire, loosed before its time and in the wrong place, burns the house down. The charge of 2:7 is a guardrail set lovingly around something precious, warning us not to awaken the full flame of romantic and physical love before its proper season, which God appointed to be marriage.

This cuts directly against the spirit of our age, which teaches that desire is its own justification, that if you feel it you should follow it, that waiting is foolish and self-denial is repression. The Word of God says otherwise. There is wisdom in waiting. There is honor in restraint. "Flee fornication," Paul writes (1 Corinthians 6:18), and "this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication" (1 Thessalonians 4:3). The boundaries God draws around love are not the enemy of love. They are its protection.

Self-control is not weakness, it is strength, a fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23). The one who can wait for love's proper time, who refuses to awaken it before God's appointed hour, has learned something the world cannot teach. Purity is not the absence of passion. It is passion rightly governed, held in trust, kept for its proper place. The bride herself, full of longing as she

is, charges others not to rush. She knows what she is talking about. The flame is worth protecting.

For young and old alike, the refrain is a call to honor God with our desires, to trust His timing, and to believe that what He guards, He guards for our joy. The one who saves the fire for the hearth will be warmed all the days of his life. The one who scatters it carelessly will be burned. This is the fear of the Lord applied to the most intimate region of the heart, and it is wisdom.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Love is powerful and must be handled with reverence and care (Song 8:6)
- Not awakening love before its proper time, which God appointed to marriage
- God's boundaries around love protect rather than restrict it
- Fleeing fornication and pursuing sanctification (1 Corinthians 6:18; 1 Thessalonians 4:3)
- Self-control as a fruit of the Spirit, not repression (Galatians 5:22-23)
- Purity as passion rightly governed and kept for its proper place
- Trusting God's timing with our desires as an act of faith

Discussion Prompts

- Why does the world treat waiting as foolish, and how does Scripture answer that?
- What does it look like, practically, to not "stir up love" before its time?
- How is self-control a strength rather than a weakness?

Question 10

Student Question:

Looking back across this whole opening passage, the longing, the honesty, the first words of love, and the charge to wait, name one specific way Jesus is using these verses to form you. What is He asking you to long for, to lay down, or to wait for?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

We have walked through the whole opening passage, and now we gather it up. We heard the bride's open longing for her beloved, and were pressed to ask where our own desires are aimed. We heard her honesty, "I am black, but comely," and learned to hold our flaws and our security in the same hand. We heard the first words of love spoken aloud, and were reminded to honor those we love. And we heard the charge to wait, not to awaken love before its time. Every thread of this passage is being woven by the hand of God to form something in you.

The Christian life is not merely about gaining information. It is about transformation, being conformed to the image of Christ (Romans 8:29). So the question is not only what these verses mean, but what Jesus is doing in you through them. Perhaps He is asking you to redirect a longing, to want Him above all the good gifts He gives. Perhaps He is asking you to rest under His

banner of love instead of striving under a banner of fear. Perhaps He is asking you to wait, to trust His timing, to govern a flame that has been burning where it should not.

Name it. Be specific. Vague resolutions evaporate by Tuesday. “I will be more spiritual” changes nothing. But “I will tend my own neglected vineyard by spending the first ten minutes of each morning with God” can change a life. “I will speak one word of genuine honor to my spouse each day” can warm a marriage. “I will trust God’s timing and refuse to awaken what should wait” can guard a soul. The Word of God does its forming work in the particulars.

And let this opening lesson leave you with hope. The same God who wrote this song over married love has set His own banner of love over you in Christ. He loved you and gave Himself for you. The longing of your soul, finally, is for Him, and He is found by those who seek Him. As you continue in this study, may you not only admire the love between these two, but be drawn deeper into the love of the One who is the true Bridegroom of His people, and may you remain faithful under His banner to the end.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The goal of Scripture is transformation into the image of Christ (Romans 8:29)
- Moving from knowing the text to being formed by it
- Specific obedience over vague resolution
- Redirecting longing, resting in love, and trusting God’s timing
- Christ as the true Bridegroom and the soul’s deepest longing
- Faithfulness maintained to the end under God’s banner of love

Discussion Prompts

- What is the one specific thing God is asking you to do in response to this passage?
- Which thread of this lesson, longing, honesty, honor, or waiting, struck you most, and why?
- How is Jesus drawing you, through this song, into a deeper love for Him?