

The Song of Solomon, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 3: The Wedding Procession and the Praise of the Bride

Song of Solomon 3:6–5:1

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

What is doctrinally at stake here is the goodness and design of marriage itself, and the dignity of the love God created for husband and wife. The world around us has pulled marriage in two directions at once, cheapening physical love by ripping it out of covenant, and at the same time treating covenant faithfulness as a cage. This passage corrects both errors. It honors the public, celebrated, lifelong covenant of one man and one woman, and it honors the physical love within that covenant as God's good gift, blessed by God Himself at 5:1. The teacher must hold these together: reverence without prudishness, joy without crudeness. We affirm what God affirms, and we draw the line exactly where He draws it, inside the one-flesh marriage and nowhere else.

The "garden inclosed" deserves careful, unhurried teaching. It is the interpretive key to the whole lesson. Purity is not presented as a grim restriction but as a beautiful thing, a walled garden, a sealed fountain, a treasure kept for the one to whom it belongs. Help the class feel the attractiveness of faithfulness rather than only its rules. Many in the room, married and single alike, carry wounds and failures in this area. Teach the standard plainly, but teach it as good news, and remember that the same God who set the boundary offers forgiveness and cleansing to all who come to Him in obedience.

The spiritual formation aim is twofold. First, to move every student toward gladder faithfulness, to guard the garden not out of fear but out of love. Second, to lift the eyes from the human picture to its ultimate meaning, the love of Christ for His church. Without forcing every verse into allegory, the teacher should let Ephesians 5 do its work, so that married and single, young and old, all leave seeing themselves as the bride for whom the heavenly Bridegroom came out of heaven, and all are drawn to love Him in return.

Question 1

Student Question:

When the watchers ask, "Who is this that cometh out of the wilderness?" and the Song describes Solomon's procession with its guard of sixty men and its day of "espousals" and "gladness," what does this teach us about God's intention that marriage be a public, honored, covenant event rather than a private arrangement?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The scene shifts dramatically at 3:6. The intimate garden of chapter 2 gives way to a wide-open road and a watching crowd, “Who is this that cometh out of the wilderness like pillars of smoke, perfumed with myrrh and frankincense, with all powders of the merchant?” This is the language of spectacle. The procession is visible from far off, announced by clouds of fragrant smoke, the kind of arrival a whole community comes out to witness. Whatever else the Song is doing, it is insisting that this marriage is not hidden. It is public, honored, and celebrated.

Verses 7 through 8 describe Solomon’s traveling couch surrounded by “threescore valiant men,” each with a sword, “because of fear in the night.” The bride is brought with protection and dignity. Verses 9 and 10 describe the carriage itself, made of the wood of Lebanon, with pillars of silver, a base of gold, a covering of purple, the inside lovingly adorned. No expense is spared. This is a king honoring the day of his marriage with everything he has.

The summit of the procession comes in verse 11, “Go forth, O ye daughters of Zion, and behold king Solomon with the crown wherewith his mother crowned him in the day of his espousals, and in the day of the gladness of his heart.” Two phrases anchor the whole lesson here: “the day of his espousals,” his wedding day, and “the day of the gladness of his heart.” Marriage is meant to be the gladdest day, and the Song frames it as such without apology.

For us the contrast with our own age is sharp. We can spend lavishly on a wedding and yet privatize the marriage, as if the covenant were nobody’s business but the couple’s. Scripture treats marriage as a public covenant witnessed by the community and ultimately by God. The crowd that comes out to watch the procession is not intruding. They are doing what a community is supposed to do, surrounding a new covenant with honor and joy.

The believer cannot read of a king coming in glory for his bride, out of the wilderness, in clouds, without hearing a deeper echo. The bridegroom who came from heaven for His church will one day be revealed in glory, and the cry will go up again, the marriage of the Lamb is come. We do not force the allegory, but we let the resonance stand.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Marriage in God’s design is a public covenant, not a private arrangement (Malachi 2:14).
- The community has a proper role in honoring and surrounding a marriage with joy.
- The Song frames the wedding day as the gladdest of days, dignifying marriage rather than treating it lightly.
- Lavish honor is given to the covenant itself, not merely to the celebration.
- The procession coming in glory faintly anticipates Christ coming for His bride (Revelation 19:7), but this is resonance, not a forced allegory.

Discussion Prompts

- Why do you think God designed marriage to be a public, witnessed covenant rather than a purely private decision?

- What is lost when we keep the wedding lavish but treat the actual marriage covenant as casual or private?
- How does the picture of a king coming in glory for his bride deepen when you read it as a believer who belongs to Christ?

Question 2

Student Question:

Think about the weddings you have attended or the way you have thought about your own marriage or a future one. In what ways have you treated marriage casually or privately, and what would it look like to recover the sense of joy, ceremony, and public covenant the Song celebrates?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

It is worth pausing on how easily we drift into treating marriage casually. Living in an age of disposable commitments and quiet quitting, we can absorb the assumption that a marriage is mainly a feeling, and feelings change, so commitments are provisional. The Song's procession quietly rebukes that. The king's wedding is treated as the gladdest, most honored day, surrounded by witnesses and beauty and gravity.

Notice the word "gladness." The Song does not present the wedding day as the day duty was assumed but as "the day of the gladness of his heart." Christian faithfulness is not meant to be joyless endurance. If you grew up thinking of covenant mainly as the thing that traps you, the Song wants to retrain your imagination. Covenant is the soil in which joy grows deepest, because love without security is always a little anxious.

For the married, the question is whether the gladness of the wedding day still informs how you treat your spouse on an ordinary Tuesday. For the single, the question is whether you are guarding the seriousness and joy of marriage in how you think and speak about it now, long before any procession sets out.

And for all of us, public covenant means accountability. A privatized marriage answers to no one. A covenant witnessed by the church and by God invites the community to help us keep what we promised. That is not intrusion. That is grace with skin on.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- We are tempted to privatize and trivialize marriage, treating it as a revocable feeling.
- Covenant is the soil of lasting joy, not the enemy of it.
- The gladness of the wedding day should inform ordinary married life, not evaporate after the ceremony.
- Public covenant brings healthy accountability through the community and before God.

Discussion Prompts

- Where have you absorbed the cultural idea that commitment is provisional, and how has it shaped your relationships?
- If you are married, does the gladness of your wedding day still shape how you treat your spouse on an ordinary day?
- How can the church community help married couples keep the covenant they made publicly?

Question 3

Student Question:

In chapter 4 the bridegroom praises his bride at length and tenderly, "Behold, thou art fair, my love." What does this sustained, specific praise reveal about how God designed love within marriage to express itself, and why does it matter that he speaks his delight aloud rather than merely feeling it?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Chapter 4 opens with the bridegroom's praise, and it is striking how specific and unhurried it is. "Behold, thou art fair, my love; behold, thou art fair." He repeats himself. He is not in a hurry to get past his delight. Then he moves through one image after another, her eyes, her hair, her teeth, her lips, in a series of comparisons drawn from the beauty of the land around them. Whatever we make of the ancient imagery, the point is plain. He sees her, and he speaks what he sees.

This is love that does not stay silent. There is a kind of affection that assumes the other person already knows how we feel and therefore never says it. The Song will have none of that. Love, by God's design, expresses itself. It speaks delight aloud. It blesses with words. The husband here is not performing flattery. He is honoring his bride by naming her beauty before her.

We should let this confront our habitual silence. Many marriages and friendships starve not for lack of love but for lack of spoken love. We feel grateful and never say it. We notice beauty and never name it. The Song models a love that turns feeling into words, and words into blessing.

There is a theological note underneath. God Himself is a God who speaks His delight. He spoke over creation, "it was very good." He spoke over His Son, "in whom I am well pleased." To speak blessing over those we love is to imitate the God in whose image we are made, male and female, made to bless one another with words.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Love by God's design expresses itself in words, not merely in feeling.
- Specific, spoken praise honors and builds up the one loved.

- Many relationships starve for lack of spoken love rather than lack of love itself.
- Speaking blessing imitates God, who speaks His delight over His creation and His Son.

Discussion Prompts

- Why is it not enough simply to feel love? What does speaking it accomplish that silent feeling cannot?
- Who in your life rarely hears your delight or gratitude spoken aloud?
- How does the fact that God speaks His delight encourage you to do the same with the people you love?

Question 4

Student Question:

Whom has God given you to love, a spouse, a family member, a friend in the body of Christ, and when did you last actually speak your delight and gratitude to them rather than assuming they know? What is one thing you will say this week?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the place to get practical. The bridegroom turns feeling into spoken blessing, and the question for us is direct. Whom has God given you to love, and when did you last actually say it? It is easy to assume the people closest to us simply know how we feel. They often do not. Spoken love is a gift only you can give, and its absence leaves a quiet hunger.

Think about the specific person. Not love in general, but this husband, this wife, this aging parent, this friend in the congregation who has carried you. Specific praise lands where general goodwill never reaches. The Song does not say “you are nice.” It names what it sees.

There is also a discipline here. Words of blessing are a habit to be built, not just a mood to wait for. You can decide to speak gratitude even on a day you do not feel especially warm, and the speaking itself often rekindles the warmth. Love is partly a practice we grow into.

Make it concrete before you leave this question. One person. One thing you will say. This week. The Song’s bridegroom did not save his praise for a special occasion. He spoke it on the wedding day and, the rest of the Song shows, kept speaking it.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- We wrongly assume those closest to us already know how we feel.
- Specific spoken praise reaches where general goodwill does not.
- Speaking blessing is a habit to build, not only a mood to wait for.
- Concrete resolve, one person and one word, turns conviction into action.

Discussion Prompts

- Name one specific person and one specific thing you will tell them this week.
- What has kept you from speaking love and gratitude more freely in the past?
- Have you found that speaking love can rekindle feeling, rather than only following it? Where have you seen that?

Question 5

Student Question:

The bridegroom calls his bride “my sister, my spouse,” joining deep affection to settled commitment. What does this twofold name teach about the kind of love God blesses, and how does it differ from a love that is all passion and no covenant, or all duty and no delight?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Twice in chapter 4 the bridegroom calls his bride “my sister, my spouse.” The pairing is deliberate and rich. “Sister” speaks of settled, family-deep affection, the kind of bond that is not going anywhere, a love woven into who you are. “Spouse” speaks of covenant and the unique union of marriage. Together they describe a love that is both tender and committed, both warm and permanent.

This twofold name guards against two distortions. There is a love that is all passion and no covenant, intense feeling with no commitment underneath, and it cannot last because feelings ebb. And there is a love that is all duty and no delight, faithful but cold, keeping the rules while the warmth drains away. God’s design holds the two together. The covenant gives the affection a safe home, and the affection gives the covenant its joy.

Notice that the affection word comes first in his mouth, “my sister,” and then the covenant word, “my spouse.” He is not choosing between tenderness and faithfulness. He refuses to separate them. Strong marriages, and strong friendships in the body of Christ, are built where deep affection and settled commitment grow together.

The phrase also dignifies the bride. To call her sister is to treat her as family, an equal, a person of worth, not a possession. The one-flesh union God designed is between two image-bearers, male and female, each made in the image of God, joined in covenant and cherished with affection.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- “Sister and spouse” joins deep affection to settled covenant commitment.
- Love that is all passion and no covenant cannot endure; love that is all duty and no delight grows cold.
- God’s design holds tenderness and faithfulness together, each strengthening the other.
- Calling the bride “sister” dignifies her as a fellow image-bearer, not a possession (Genesis 1:27).

Discussion Prompts

- What goes wrong in a relationship that has passion but no covenant? What goes wrong when there is covenant but no warmth?
- Which of those two errors are you more prone to, and why?
- How does treating a spouse or loved one as a fellow image-bearer change the way you speak to and about them?

Question 6

Student Question:

Are there relationships in your life where you have leaned too far toward feeling without faithfulness, or toward obligation without warmth? Which way do you tend to drift, and what would the balance of “sister and spouse” look like for you?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Now press the “sister and spouse” balance into your own relationships. Most of us lean one way. Some of us are warm but unreliable, full of affection that never quite hardens into commitment and follow-through. Others of us are faithful as clockwork but have let the warmth go cold, doing all the right things with none of the delight.

Diagnosis matters here. Ask honestly which way you drift. The fix is different depending on the answer. If you drift toward feeling without faithfulness, the call is to build reliability, to keep promises, to show up. If you drift toward duty without delight, the call is to recover tenderness, to speak affection, to enjoy the person and not merely serve them.

This applies beyond marriage. The same imbalance shows up in friendships, in family, in the way we relate to brothers and sisters in the congregation. We can be present without being warm, or warm without being dependable. The body of Christ needs members who are both.

And it applies to our walk with God. We can serve Him dutifully with a cold heart, or feel stirred toward Him with no obedience underneath. He asks for both, a love that delights in Him and a faithfulness that keeps His commandments. The two were never meant to be separated.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Most people drift either toward feeling without faithfulness or toward duty without delight.
- Honest self-diagnosis points to the specific growth needed.
- The imbalance shows up in friendship, family, and church life, not only marriage.
- Our walk with God also requires both delight and obedience, never one without the other (John 14:15).

Discussion Prompts

- Which way do you drift, toward warmth without reliability or reliability without warmth?
- What is one concrete step that would restore the missing half in your most important relationship?
- Does the same imbalance show up in your walk with God? What would the balance look like there?

Question 7

Student Question:

The crowning image of the lesson is “a garden inclosed is my sister, my spouse; a spring shut up, a fountain sealed.” What is the Song saying about purity and exclusivity in marriage, and why does it picture faithfulness as a walled garden of beauty rather than merely a list of prohibitions?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

We come to the crowning image, “A garden inclosed is my sister, my spouse; a spring shut up, a fountain sealed.” A garden with a wall around it. A spring with a cover. A fountain with a seal. The picture is of something beautiful and life-giving that is also reserved, kept, set apart for one. This is the Song’s portrait of purity and faithfulness in marriage.

Notice what the image does not do. It does not picture purity as a barren wasteland or a cold prison. It pictures a garden, lush, fragrant, alive, full of choice fruits and spices, as the verses that follow describe. The wall does not make the garden less beautiful. The wall is what keeps the garden the bride’s own to give. Faithfulness, in the Song’s vision, is not the absence of love but the protection of it.

This reframes how we think about purity. We often present it as a list of prohibitions, do not do this, do not go there. The Song presents it as a treasure guarded for the one to whom it belongs. The exclusivity is the point. A fountain shared with everyone is no longer a gift to anyone. A garden with no wall is just a field. What makes the love precious is precisely that it is kept.

Scripture says the same elsewhere. Proverbs urges the husband to drink from his own cistern and rejoice in the wife of his youth, the fountain kept for one. Hebrews calls marriage honorable and the bed undefiled. The walled garden is God’s good design, and the wall is a mercy, not a cruelty.

For the believer there is one more layer. The church is meant to be a garden kept for Christ, faithful to her one Lord, not giving her devotion away to idols and rivals. Spiritual faithfulness, like marital faithfulness, is a garden with a wall, devotion reserved for the One to whom it belongs.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Purity and faithfulness are pictured as a walled garden and a sealed fountain, kept for one.

- The wall does not diminish the beauty; it preserves the love as a gift to be given.
- Exclusivity is the very thing that makes the love precious (Proverbs 5:15–19).
- Purity is better framed as a guarded treasure than as a list of prohibitions.
- The church too is meant to be a garden kept faithful to her one Lord (2 Corinthians 11:2).

Discussion Prompts

- Why does the Song picture faithfulness as a beautiful walled garden rather than a barren restriction?
- How does framing purity as a guarded treasure change the way you think about it?
- What does it look like for the church, and for you, to be a garden kept faithful to Christ alone?

Question 8

Student Question:

Be honest before God about the walls around your own “garden.” What guards your heart, eyes, time, and devotion for the one to whom they belong, whether a spouse or, if single, your future spouse and your Lord? Where has a wall come down, and how will you rebuild it?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Now turn the image inward. What are the walls around your own garden? Every faithful life has walls, the practical guards we set around our hearts, eyes, time, and devotion to keep them for the one to whom they belong. For the married, that is your spouse. For the single, it is your future spouse and, above all, your Lord.

Be specific and honest. Where has a wall come down? Maybe it is the eyes, drifting where they should not, screens that have become a side door into the garden. Maybe it is the heart, an emotional attachment forming where it has no business. Maybe it is time and attention quietly redirected away from the people you have promised to love. Walls rarely fall all at once. They erode.

This is searching work, and it should be done before God, not for show. The point is not shame but repair. A wall that has come down can be rebuilt. The God who set the boundary is the God who forgives and cleanses those who come to Him, and who gives grace to start guarding the garden again.

And take heart in the goodness of the design. The walls are not God being stingy. They are God protecting something He intends to be beautiful and joyful. Rebuilding a wall is not retreating into a smaller life. It is keeping the garden that the love may stay a gift.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Faithfulness requires real, practical walls around heart, eyes, time, and devotion.

- Walls usually erode gradually rather than fall all at once.
- Honest examination before God aims at repair and repentance, not shame.
- Rebuilding a fallen wall is possible through God's forgiveness and grace (1 John 1:9).

Discussion Prompts

- What walls currently guard your heart, eyes, time, and devotion, and where has one come down?
- What is one specific wall you need to rebuild this week, and how will you do it?
- How does seeing the walls as protection of something good, rather than mere restriction, change your willingness to keep them?

Question 9

Student Question:

At 5:1 the marriage is consummated and God Himself blesses the union, "Eat, O friends; drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved." Taking the whole passage together, what does it reveal about God as the author of love and marriage, about the goodness of physical love within the one-flesh union, and about how this earthly covenant images the love of Christ for His church?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The lesson reaches its goal at 5:1, where the marriage is consummated and the bridegroom declares, "I am come into my garden, my sister, my spouse," and the verse closes with a voice blessing the union, "Eat, O friends; drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved." The garden that was inclosed is now rightly entered by the one to whom it belongs. What was guarded is now given, within the covenant, as God designed. We handle this verse with reverence, the way we would handle anything holy, and we let it say what it says: physical love within marriage is good, and God blesses it.

That final voice matters. Most scholars hear it as the voice of the poet, or of God Himself, or of the wedding guests, blessing what has taken place. Whoever speaks, the effect is the same. Heaven is not embarrassed by the love of husband and wife. It celebrates. The same God who set the wall around the garden delights when the garden is entered rightly. There is no shame here, no winking innuendo, only blessing. God is the author of this love, and He calls it good, naked and unashamed as it was in Eden.

Take the whole passage together and a doctrine of marriage emerges. God designed the one-flesh union of one man and one woman, public and celebrated, both faithful and joyful, both reverent and freely given within the covenant. Physical love is not a concession or a necessary evil. It is God's good gift, fenced for safety and blessed for joy. The Song refuses both the world's crudeness and the false piety that treats the body as shameful.

And then there is the deepest layer, the one Ephesians 5 makes explicit. This earthly covenant images the love of Christ for His church. The bridegroom who came out of heaven gave Himself for His bride to sanctify and cleanse her, to present her to Himself glorious, without spot. The wedding of the Lamb is the marriage every earthly marriage was always pointing toward. We do not flatten the Song into pure allegory, but we let it lift our eyes. The love a husband and wife are meant to enjoy is a living parable of a greater love that came for us, that guards us, that delights in us, and that will one day bring us home to a wedding supper that never ends.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Physical love within the one-flesh marriage is God's good gift, blessed by God Himself (Genesis 2:24–25; Hebrews 13:4).
- The closing blessing shows heaven celebrates, not merely tolerates, married love.
- A full doctrine of marriage emerges: public, faithful, joyful, reverent, and freely given within covenant.
- The Song rejects both the world's crudeness and a false piety that treats the body as shameful.
- The earthly covenant images Christ's love for His church, the Bridegroom who came to cleanse and present her glorious (Ephesians 5:25–32).
- Every earthly marriage points toward the wedding supper of the Lamb (Revelation 19:7–9).

Discussion Prompts

- What does it mean for our view of the body and of marriage that God Himself blesses the union at 5:1?
- How does the Song correct both the world's crudeness and a false piety that treats physical love as shameful?
- In what ways does this earthly love picture the love of Christ for His church, and how should that shape how you love and how you receive His love?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back across the whole procession, the praise, the garden, and the blessing. Name one specific way Jesus, the bridegroom who came out of heaven for His bride, is forming you through this passage to love more faithfully, to guard your purity more gladly, or to receive His delight in you more fully.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Look back now across the whole sweep of the lesson. The procession came out of the wilderness in glory. The bridegroom spoke his delight aloud. The bride was a garden inclosed, treasured and kept. And the marriage was consummated and blessed by heaven itself. Each scene has been

quietly pointing past itself to a greater Bridegroom, the one who came out of heaven for a bride He loved before she ever loved Him.

So make it personal. Jesus is forming you through this passage. Perhaps He is calling you to love more faithfully, to be the kind of garden He can trust, the kind of spouse or friend who keeps covenant warmly. Perhaps He is teaching you to guard your purity more gladly, seeing the walls at last as mercy rather than restriction. Perhaps, most tenderly of all, He is inviting you to receive His delight in you, to believe that the Bridegroom looks at His blood-bought bride and says, “thou art all fair, there is no spot in thee.”

That last point is the gospel for the weary and the failing. The church is presented to Christ glorious, without spot, not because she was always faithful but because He cleansed her. He came out of heaven, gave Himself, and washed His bride. We enter that cleansing as He appointed, hearing the word, believing in Him, repenting of sin, confessing His name, and being baptized into His death and raised to walk in newness of life. And then we keep the garden, faithful to the end, until the wedding supper of the Lamb.

Name your one specific way before you close. Not ten resolutions, one. To love more faithfully, to guard the garden more gladly, or to receive His delight more fully. Let the Bridegroom who is coming again find His bride keeping covenant and longing for the day.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The whole passage points to Christ, the Bridegroom who came from heaven for His bride (John 3:29).
- Jesus forms us through it to love faithfully, guard purity gladly, and receive His delight.
- Christ presents His church glorious and without spot by cleansing her, not by her own merit (Ephesians 5:26–27).
- We enter that cleansing by hearing, believing, repenting, confessing, and being baptized into Christ (Acts 2:38; Romans 6:3–4), then keep faithful to the end.
- One specific, named response anchors conviction into a changed life.

Discussion Prompts

- Of the three, loving more faithfully, guarding purity more gladly, receiving His delight more fully, which is Jesus pressing on you most right now?
- How does it change you to know that Christ presents His bride spotless by His own cleansing, not by her perfection?
- What is the one specific way you will respond this week to the Bridegroom who came for you?