

Before we get into the interpretation, we should note that the first four verses of the chapter have addressed marriage consummation. It seems to me the entire song is declaring the joys of marriage and often addresses intimacy with the metaphor of eating and drinking. From verse 5 to 8 we are looking back at the period of courtship. The book does not follow a chronological order but seems to be a collection of love poems. Verses 9-11 will address the marriage and 12-17 returns to the consummation described in verse 4. Thus, 5 through 17 has a chronological pattern.

⁵ I am very dark, but lovely, O daughters of Jerusalem, like the tents of Kedar, like the curtains of Solomon. ^{6a} Do not gaze at me because I am dark, because the sun has looked upon me. Song of Songs 1:5,6a Miss. Solomon (Shulamite is the feminine form of Solomon), like many women, was critical of her own appearance. She felt the darkness of her skin from being in the sun made her unattractive. Yet she knew she had lovely features. She compared the contrast to the black goat hair tents with Solomon's beautifully embroidered curtains. Whether that is the curtains of his palace or of the temple, we cannot tell. Either way they are beautifully woven with images. She is saying her dark skin mars her natural beauty.

Women, no one is the perfect inner and outer beauty. Even Miss Universes have what they perceive as flaws. That is why plastic surgeons are so wealthy, and makeup is a billion-dollar industry. But there is One who finds you lovely, and if you are blessed with a loving husband, then there are two. We will see that in verses later in this chapter.

We tend to think the Lord is continually critical of us. We can be too hard on ourselves, like women tend to be overly critical of their appearance. When we are sensitive to the conviction of the Holy Spirit, we sometimes think that our weaknesses cause us to be unattractive to our Lord. But when He looks on us, He sees His own righteousness (2 Corinthians 5:21ⁱ). He knows we are a work in progress, but He can see past that to the finished work - a spotless radiant bride (Ephesians 5:25-27ⁱⁱ).

There is a fine line between introspection of our spiritual state and condemnation. People who are humble readily recognize their weaknesses and are sensitive to the conviction of the Holy Spirit. They regularly ask the Lord for forgiveness (1 John 1:9ⁱⁱⁱ). The Word exhorts us to examine ourselves to see if we are in the faith (2 Corinthians 13:5^{iv}). That is a realistic and healthy way to stay on track. But we should also appreciate the fact that the blood of Christ has covered all our sins (Ephesians 1:7^v), and we are fully accepted in Christ (Ephesians 1:6^{vi}). Realizing how gracious God has been to us who often fall so short of His glory should mean we love Him even more (Luke 7:47^{vii}). The prideful see no need for self-examination. And there are those who take the grace of God for granted (2 Corinthians 6:1^{viii}). The Shulamite knows she is beautiful in Solomon's eyes, but she is aware of how imperfect she is as well. The closer we get the Light the more we can see the sin that we could not see before. The more light, the more we grieve over our many failures and long to be transformed, and the more uncomfortable we are with the praise of man (1 Peter 5:6^{ix}).

The enemy of our soul wants us to think God is fed up with us and will reject us. We can reject Him, but He has promised to never leave us or forsake us (Hebrews 13:5^x). His love is that of a perfect father for his child. He even compares it to a mother's love for her children and says it is impossible to forget us. He even says He has engraved us

on His hand (Isaiah 49:15,16^{xi}). I think of that engraving as the nail holes reminding us of the extent to which He went in His love for us. So, when the enemy tries to get you depressed and tells you how bad you are, or **when you are beating yourself up for your failures, remember that you are loved and perfect in God's eyes.** Confess your faults to the Lord and know that He has forgiven you (1 John 1 :9ⁱⁱⁱ). He cannot love you any more than He does right now. Know that you are loved more than you will ever comprehend. Meditate on it. He died to make you His own. Just because you are weak and imperfect now, He is not going to forsake you. You were that way when He died for you. He already knew what you would do later in life. But He also knew what He could make of you. He is the potter. We are the clay (Isaiah 64:8^{xii}). Yield to His loving hands.

It is the enemy of your soul who wants you to think God loves you less because you have stumbled and are still struggling with issues in your life. Just as Solomon with the Shunamite woman, He has already made a covenant with you (1 Corinthians 11:25^{xiii}). He will never love you less. Believe in His wonderful name and gracious character. Believe He is speaking only truth when He says that He loves you with the greatest love (John 15:13^{xiv}).

^{6b} My mother's sons were angry with me; they made me keeper of the vineyards, but my own vineyard I have not kept! Song of Songs 1:6b Her brothers had her out in the sun working their vineyards, to the point that she had neglected her own. This tells us she was from the country. Jews saw fair skin as lovely, as it represented those of wealth who did not need to labor in the sun. The daughters of Jerusalem would be city dwellers with fairer skin. The contrast of being lowly and yet soon to be exalted is the story of all who receive the grace of God (Psalm 136:23^{xv}). We will see many times in which Solomon looks past her dark skin and sees her beauty, just as our Lord looks beyond our dark past and sees the beauty of us being made in the image of God and our future beauty when His work in us is complete (Philippians 1:6^{xvi}).

Were the brothers jealous because the king was interested in her? It seems like any family would be honored to have one of their sisters marry a king, especially one as wise and successful as Solomon. It may have been some form of sibling rivalry. Perhaps she was somewhat prideful of Solomon's attention, so the brothers responded by humbling her. We can see something similar in the account of Joseph. Some interpret the brothers' anger as being from the fact that she gave Solomon the income from her vineyard instead of giving it to the family (8:12^{xvii}). If that is the case, it follows the New Testament pattern of loving Christ more than family (Luke 14:26^{xviii}).

This may apply to the Christian worker, busy serving the Lord and others, but neglecting his or her own spiritual life. I am often in danger of routine and duty and operating in my own power. If I think I can do it, then there is no life in it. **Without Jesus we can do nothing (John 15:5^{xix}). But through Him we can do all things (Philippians 4:13^{xx}).** Whatever your ministry may be, it must come out of a love for Christ and dependency on His inspiration and direction if it is to bring glory to God. If we do it out of duty or obligation or routine it becomes lifeless.

Keep your own vineyard by taking time to let God's Word stir your heart. What you teach or share is full of life when it has touched your own heart. Keep your own vineyard by speaking often with the Holy Spirit and seeking His direction. It seems in this passage that she leaves the vineyards behind to pursue her lover. If you are lacking in

zeal, it may be time to let the other vineyards go and take a season alone with God in His Word. We should ever be enraptured with Christ, which leads us to the next verse.

⁷ Tell me, you whom my soul loves, where you pasture your flock, where you make it lie down at noon; for why should I be like one who veils herself beside the flocks of your companions? Song of Songs 1:7 Is Solomon out shepherding a flock in his youth. Probably not. So, we should take this as poetic language. She is asking him where she can meet up with him during the day while he takes a siesta. The nation is his flock. The term of shepherd is often used for Israel's leader. In that sense, he is a type of Jesus our great Shepherd (Psalm 23:1^{xxi}; John 10:11^{xxii}). She does not want to go around asking all his underlings if they have seen him.

See how she addresses him, *“you whom my soul loves.”* Is that how you think of Jesus? Do you mentally and emotionally desire to be with Jesus? The prophet Daniel was known for getting away three times a day to pray. It was such a pattern that his enemies counted on it (Daniel 6:10^{xxiii}). Would your enemies find a prayer pattern in your life?

Do you remember your desire before you were married to be with the one you had set your affections on? Any time you could take time to be alone together was thrilling. We can be that way with the Lord. Did you see the golden leaves of fall this year? Did you stop and thank the Lord and praise Him for the beauty He made for us to enjoy? Or when that song on the radio spoke to your heart about the goodness of God and His love for you, did you just let it pass? Or did you savor it and thank Him for speaking to you that way? Remember sneaking a kiss with your future spouse? There was a physical element to it, but there was a soul desire as well. Does your soul desire to be alone with Jesus and hear Him speak to you personally? *Jesus, the very thought of thee, With sweetness fills my breast; But sweeter far thy face to see, And in thy presence rest. For those who find thee, find a bliss, No tongue, nor pen can show The love of Jesus, what it is, None but his loved ones know.* (Bernard of Clairvaux)

Some people would say that Jesus does not speak to us individually. Really? Jesus said, *“My sheep hear my voice”* (John 10:3,4^{xxiv}). He goes on to say that He calls us by name. When from eternity you look back and see all that Jesus did to make you His bride, the many times He intervened in your life, the paths He took you down, the people He had you meet, the thoughts He sowed into your mind, you will be overwhelmed at all the attention and love that He personally showered on you! The psalmist declared that His thoughts toward you outnumber the grains of sand (Psalm 139:17,18^{xxv}).

Oh, that we were so eager to meet up with the Lord during the day and have quiet, intimate communion with Him as the Shulamite desires in this passage. The wonderful difference is that He is never too busy, and we never need to search for Him. As the following verses show us, He longs to meet with us at any time (Hebrews 4:16^{xxvi}). He never leaves our side (Psalm 16:8^{xxvii}). My hope for us as we go through this book is that we fall head over heels in love with Jesus. I want us to know His love to a greater degree so that a greater love is born in us. Then we will not feel that it is our duty to take time to pray and get in the Word, but rather we will be eager to do so. If you have been born again, that should be your heart's desire (Psalm 27:4^{xxviii}). We find the world screams for our attention and is full of demands. But love makes a way. It finds time. We ask the One whom our soul loves when we can escape the busyness of life and just rest our head on his chest, like John did at the Last Supper (John 13:23^{xxix}).

The last two lines are difficult to interpret. I read it as saying that she does not want to have to search for him, as she hides her face so others do not try to make advances on her. It adds incentive for him to tell her where he will be at the noon break. In the middle east many cultures rested during the heat of the day. She could be with him without all the business of state interrupting them.

Some interpreters point out that prostitutes in that day would wear a veil. They read this saying that she is not just looking for any lover. For her, there is only one whom her soul loves. No other will do. From that perspective, the world cannot satisfy. Only he can. Is that your heart? Ask yourself what you desire the most (Matthew 6:21^{xxx}).

⁸ *If you do not know, O most beautiful among women, follow in the tracks of the flock, and pasture your young goats beside the shepherds' tents.* Song of Songs 1:8 The people are his flock, and they are coming to him for guidance and verdicts. Just follow those who are coming for counsel. They know where he is. This can relate to discipleship. Follow those who know where to find Jesus.

Words are powerful! We can build up one another with them. We can also destroy a person with them. The Shulammitte woman has spoken of the darkness of her skin as a feature that mars her beauty. It is how she felt about her appearance, and she feared it would affect how the king viewed her. We have come to the first of many loving words that come from the lips of the king to reassure her how valued she is. He calls her the *most beautiful among women* and will say it again and again.

She would probably not win a beauty pageant in our day, for the standards of beauty in women have changed over time and are different in different cultures. In West Africa, the more obese the woman the more attractive she is to the men. Here in the Western world men look for the Barbie Doll figure. But each man knows the beauty he first saw in his wife. That is like the beauty Christ sees in us, o most beautiful believer. Will you hear Him say that to you? It is difficult to receive those words because we know how black our soul can be. **Can you accept that Jesus sees you perfected?** The Apostle Paul asks us that if God sent Jesus to die for us, would He withhold any good thing from us (Romans 8:32^{xxxi})? Paul who was once a Christian killer said "Jesus loved *me* and gave his life *for me*" (Galatians 2:20^{xxxii}). Is that not true of you as well, no matter how black you have been or even are now? He loves you personally. He knows you by name!

Husbands, learn a lesson from the wisest man that ever lived. As you hear his sincere words of admiration, think about how you speak to your wife. And then think again how God speaks to us through His Word. He overlooks the flaws knowing they are passing and sees the finished work. He looks with eyes of love and grace, compassion and understanding. He knows our insecurities and weaknesses and so He reassures us with the kisses of His words.

She can follow the tracks of the sheep (his business affairs) and pasture her goats by the shepherds' tents (do her daily work near his ministers). In other words, she can hang out in the courts of the palace and watch and wait for him to have time to be with her. The pastoral setting is a much more romantic way to express it. But unlike her waiting for Him, Jesus is waiting for us to set aside the busy affairs of life and meet with Him. Or better yet, He wants us to invite Him to be with us in those affairs of life so that He might be seen in us as He works through us.

This is one reason I longed to become a pastor. I wanted to be near the flock, because that is where He is. I knew I would have more time with Him, and I wanted that

more than wealth or possessions. But you do not have to want to be a minister. Anyone can find more time with Him by simply setting aside time in your schedule to be alone with Him and in the Word and prayer. Remember, He is always waiting for you.

My very best time of the day is early morning. I always wish it would last longer. I rise early because Jesus is waiting for me. If you will take just 15 minutes every morning before your day gets going, you will soon want 30 minutes, then an hour, then you cannot get enough. I think He will always want to meet with us more than we will in this life ever long to meet with Him. But if you start, it will grow on you. Heaven is continual communion with Him, face to face! The presence of Jesus is heaven.

Looking back over verses 2 through 8 we see both singular pronouns and plural pronouns. Some people think the Shulamite is a girl in Solomon's harem and referring to the virgins as the other wives, but then why would they be called virgins? I believe it is inspired because we each have a relationship with Jesus. "Let Him kiss me," "Draw me." And we have a corporate relationship with Jesus. "Let us run," "We will exult," "We will extol." "Rightly do they love you." Together as His bride we adore Him, and individually we personally experience His love for us.

I want to stop here and save the rest of Solomon's exciting response for next week. You can read ahead and listen for Jesus to speak to your heart. It has been said that the book of Proverbs is for men. It calls out to sons to listen and learn wisdom. It warns them against lust and alcohol. It tells us of the ideal bride. Song of Songs seems to be written to women. Solomon is her Prince Charming, only much better. But that does not mean that men cannot relate. There is no male or female when it comes to salvation (Galatians 3:28^{xxxiii}). We are one body. It may be a little more difficult for us to relate than it is for women, but men also long for love. The song addresses the spiritual through the physical shadow. We are talking about a spiritual intimacy with Christ. Ephesians 5^{xxxiv} tells us that a woman's deepest need is love. As the bride of Christ, we all long to know we are unconditionally loved. The groom is told he must love his wife (Ephesians 5:33^{xxxv}). If that is God's command for earthly husbands, how perfectly must Christ exemplify that with His bride the church?

That chapter also tells us that the wife must respect her husband. The Shulamite woman obviously loves Solomon and has the greatest respect for Him. That means she would do anything he asked and longs to hear his guidance. That is the love and respect we should allow the Holy Spirit to develop in us toward Jesus. You can search the world over and you will never find a love as wonderful as Jesus' love for you. Let Him be your closest friend, your confidant, and your greatest love. May our love for Jesus increase to the place where we can say with the psalmist, ²⁵ *Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you.* Psalm 73:25

Questions:

- 1 What did the Shulamite think impaired her beauty? Spiritual parallel?
- 2 How does God see you even now?
- 3 What is the line between introspection and condemnation?
- 4 How greatly are you loved?
- 5 How can we keep our own vineyard?
- 6 What is the wonderful difference between the Shulamite seeking her lover and us seeking our Lord?
- 7 What are the two interpretations of verse 7b?
- 8 What do you desire the most?
- 9 How does Ephesians 5 relate to our relationship with Jesus?
- 10 Is Psalm 73:25 true of your heart?

ⁱ **2 Corinthians 5:21 (ESV)**

²¹ For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

ⁱⁱ **Ephesians 5:25-27 (ESV)**

²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, ²⁶ that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, ²⁷ so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.

ⁱⁱⁱ **1 John 1:9 (ESV)**

⁹ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

^{iv} **2 Corinthians 13:5 (ESV)**

⁵ Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you fail to meet the test!

^v **Ephesians 1:7 (ESV)**

⁷ In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace,

^{vi} **Ephesians 1:6 (ESV)**

⁶ to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.

^{vii} **Luke 7:47 (ESV)**

⁴⁷ Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven—for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little.”

^{viii} **2 Corinthians 6:1 (ESV)**

¹ Working together with him, then, we appeal to you not to receive the grace of God in vain.

^{ix} **1 Peter 5:6 (ESV)**

⁶ Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you,

^x **Hebrews 13:5 (ESV)**

⁵ Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, “I will never leave you nor forsake you.”

^{xi} **Isaiah 49:15-16 (ESV)**

¹⁵ “Can a woman forget her nursing child, that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you. ¹⁶ Behold, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands; your walls are continually before me.

^{xii} **Isaiah 64:8 (ESV)**

⁸ But now, O LORD, you are our Father; we are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand.

^{xiii} **1 Corinthians 11:25 (ESV)**

²⁵ In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.”

^{xiv} **John 15:13 (ESV)**

¹³ Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.

^{xv} **Psalms 136:23 (ESV)**

²³ It is he who remembered us in our low estate, for his steadfast love endures forever;

^{xvi} **Philippians 1:6 (ESV)**

⁶ And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

^{xvii} **Song of Songs 8:12 (ESV)**

¹² My vineyard, my very own, is before me; you, O Solomon, may have the thousand, and the keepers of the fruit two hundred.

^{xviii} **Luke 14:26 (ESV)**

²⁶ “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.

^{xix} **John 15:5 (ESV)**

⁵ I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

^{xx} **Philippians 4:13 (ESV)**

¹³ I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

^{xxi} **Psalms 23:1 (ESV)**

¹ The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.

^{xxii} **John 10:11 (ESV)**

¹¹ I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

^{xxiii} **Daniel 6:10 (ESV)**

¹⁰ When Daniel knew that the document had been signed, he went to his house where he had windows in his upper chamber open toward Jerusalem. He got down on his knees three times a day and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as he had done previously.

^{xxiv} **John 10:3-4 (ESV)**

³ To him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.

⁴ When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice.

^{xxv} **Psalms 139:17-18 (ESV)**

¹⁷ How precious to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them! ¹⁸ If I would count them, they are more than the sand. I awake, and I am still with you. (to me or toward me – see NIV footnote)

^{xxvi} **Hebrews 4:16 (ESV)**

¹⁶ Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

^{xxvii} **Psalms 16:8 (ESV)**

⁸ I have set the LORD always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be shaken.

^{xxviii} **Psalms 27:4 (ESV)**

⁴ One thing have I asked of the LORD, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to inquire in his temple.

^{xxix} **John 13:23 (KJV)**

²³ Now there was leaning on Jesus' bosom one of his disciples, whom Jesus loved.

^{xxx} **Matthew 6:21 (ESV)**

²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

^{xxxi} **Romans 8:32 (ESV)**

³² He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?

^{xxxii} **Galatians 2:20 (ESV)**

²⁰ I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

^{xxxiii} **Galatians 3:28 (ESV)**

²⁸ There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

^{xxxiv} **Ephesians 5:25 (ESV)**

²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her,

^{xxxv} **Ephesians 5:33 (ESV)**

³³ However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.