

Commentators struggle with the fact that verse 4 describes the consummation of their marriage but verse 6 to 11 describes the wedding. Other passages in the book describe the importance of protecting her virginity so the order seems out of place. Mitchel deals with this seeming conflict by saying that verses 1-3 describe a real event but verse 4 is a look at or expectation of a future event. In other words, the flow of thought is that from the time of her courtship till the marriage she would not let him go emotionally and her continual pursuit kept him in her grasp until the marriage was consummated. Some commentators resolve the issue by seeing this as a dream expressing her desire to be married (ESV heading). I agree with Garrett that to interpret it as a dream is more of an escape than an exegesis.¹ We could avoid the dilemma by interpreting verses 1 to 5 as during their married life and the event of verse 4 reminds them of their wedding night. Why else would she expect to find him in her bed? Whatever the case, the repetitions will point us to the importance of the passage.

¹ On my bed by night I sought him whom my soul loves; I sought him, but found him not. ² I will rise now and go about the city, in the streets and in the squares; I will seek him whom my soul loves. I sought him, but found him not. Song of Songs 3:1,2

Couples, have you ever woken at night and reached over and found your spouse was not there? Imagine if they were not in the house! I think that this is the case here. She wants him by her side even as she sleeps. He has his business during the day, but all night he belongs to her. So, she determines to get up and go out to the city square and streets to search for him. Her desire to be with her lover drives her on, but she cannot find him.

She repeats the words "whom my soul loves" in verse 2. The Hebrew word "soul" is seen as the seat of emotions. Whom I love is not as emphatic as "whom *my soul* loves." Today we might express it as "the one I am crazy about." She also repeats seeking and her disappointment at not finding him. May our hearts have such a desire to seek Him whom our soul loves, and may we grieve as she did when it seems we do not find Him.

What do you do when you wake up in the middle of the night and cannot sleep? There is another who is awake, for the Lord neither slumbers nor sleeps (Psalm 121:4ⁱⁱ). Do you immediately delight in the fact that you and the Lord are together without distractions? Or are you upset that you cannot sleep? Imagine the Lord's disappointment when you run to the cupboard for some melatonin. He was waiting to hear your voice. Do we care that He does not seem to be there? Are we seeking Him (Isaiah 55:6ⁱⁱⁱ). Will we be still and listen for His voice or meditate on what He has told us in His Word? Will we see it as an opportunity or as an annoyance? Will you seek Him whom your soul loves or count sheep as you try to force yourself back to sleep? We should be like Samuel who said, "*Speak Lord. Your servant is listening*" 1 Samuel 3:10^{iv})

There are times when we seek communion with the Lord and yet we feel as if the heavens are brass. We remember the sweet times our heart thrilled to hear His still small voice (1 Kings 19:12^v). But now there is nothing. We search our hearts to see if there is some unconfessed sin, for we know that if we regard iniquity in our hearts the Lord will not hear us (Psalm 66:18^{vi}). And yet, we do not feel that sense of peace we usually feel when we come to Him in prayer. We may be experiencing what many call the dark night of the soul. *The work of a dark night is to ween us from the sensory experience that we*

might interact with and know God in ways that are deeper than words and previous experience.^{vii}

Some of you may be in this state even now. First, know that your salvation is not based on feelings but on faith (Ephesians 2:8^{viii}). Many people of God have gone through the dark night of the soul during which God wants us to stand by faith in His Word and His unchanging nature. Persevere and walk by faith and not by sight (2 Corinthians 5:7^{ix}). Continue to pour out your heart to Him and meditate on the Scriptures. Those intimate moments will return when you have learned that the solid ground of God's Word is all you need. After having done all, stand firm (Ephesians 6:13^x)!

If your heart does convict you and you feel the Lord is distant because of your sin, remember that wonderful promise in 1 John 1:9^{xi}. *If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.* Confess and receive His forgiveness. He already paid the penalty for those sins. And if that sweet communion does not seem to be restored, stand by faith on the promise that you are forgiven. Examine your heart and see that the same spirit as the woman in our text who cries out again and again, "Him whom my soul loves," is your heart as well. For this is the first and greatest command that fulfills all the others. We should love Him with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength (Matthew 22:37-40^{xii}). Hear Jesus ask you what He asked Peter, "Do you love me?" And if you can say with Peter, "Lord, you know all things. You know that I love you," then know that you are His (John 21:15^{xiii}). Draw near to God and He will draw near to you (James 4:8^{xiv}).

The Lord may be dealing with a sinful habit in your life because He loves you and wants to see you victorious over it. Nevertheless, He loves you as much as the day He saved you. It is your love for Him that motivates you to seek His strength to overcome. It is your very hunger for fellowship with your Lord that is evidence that Jesus is the One whom your soul loves. The world does not hunger and thirst for righteousness (Matthew 5:6^{xv}). It comes from the Holy Spirit to those who belong to Jesus. If we seek Him, we will find Him (Proverbs 8:17^{xvi}). God promises,²⁹ *But from there you will seek the LORD your God and you will find him, if you search after him with all your heart and with all your soul.* Deuteronomy 4:29 It is not in the method in which you try to restore the communion you once enjoyed, but in faith in His love for you and trust that He who calls you to draw near will guide you to do so.

³ *The watchmen found me as they went about in the city. "Have you seen him whom my soul loves?"* ⁴ *Scarcely had I passed them when I found him whom my soul loves. I held him, and would not let him go until I had brought him into my mother's house, and into the chamber of her who conceived me.* Song of Songs 3:3,4 The watchmen are like police patrolling the city streets because mischief is done at night or there may be an attack from an enemy. She is taking a risk to go out into those dark streets, but her love for her man drives her on. **How fearlessly we should seek the lover of our souls!** What is the danger we face as we unashamedly seek Him? The scoffing of the worldly people? The rejection of friends? Perhaps even the loss of a job? And yet, He is worth whatever we may face. We do so because He is more than worth it!

She asked the watchmen with language that confessed her love for the king. Their response is not recorded. But a few steps further and there he is. She clings to him and will not let him go, insisting that he go back to bed with her.

In the eighth century a.d., the Venerable Bede expounded the Shulammitte in 3:1–4 as typifying Mary Magdalene and the church. At night the Shulammitte searched for Solomon, inquired of the guards, found him, then took hold of him and would not let him go. So also Mary Magdalene, while it was still dark, went to the tomb, searching for Christ. She inquired of the angels, then found him whom her soul loves, took hold of him, and did not want to let him go (Jn 20:1, 11–18). Like the Shulammitte and Mary, the church takes hold of Christ and does not let go of him.^{xvii}

Watchmen may be an analogy to the spiritual shepherds who watch over the flock (1 Peter 5:1,2^{xviii}). They can spot a searching soul or sheep wandering into a dangerous area. After inquiring of them, she went just a bit further and found him whom her soul loves. Your shepherds can tell you how they have found Jesus, but then we must go on and find Him for ourselves (1 Timothy 6:20^{xix}). Perhaps it was their testimony that gave her the faith to find and lay hold of him. Unlike the case with Mary Magdalene (John 20:17^{xx}), Christ has already ascended to the Father, and we can continue to cling to Him.

For the fourth time she refers to him as “*him whom my soul loves!*” What or whom does your soul love? No thing or person can satisfy the hunger of our soul like Jesus. Are you searching? Have you found Him? Of this great love Spurgeon writes, *If, dear friends, you can get that thought fully into your minds, that Christ is really here in our midst, you can then each one begin to say, “I have found him.”*

*But you want more than that, namely, to feel that he loves you, loves you as if there were nobody else for him to love, loves you even as the Father loves him. That is a daring thing to say, and I should never have said it if he had not first uttered it; but he says, “As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you.” (Jn. 15:9^{xxi}) Can you comprehend how each one of the blessed Trinity loves each of the others, and especially how the Father loves the Son? Even so does Jesus Christ love you, my believing brother, my believing sister. Note that he loves you; it is not only that he loved you, and died for you, but he still loves you. He says to you, individually, “I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands.” (Is. 49:16^{xxii}) Look at the nail-print; that is his memorial, his forget-me-not, and by it he says, **Forget thee I will not, I cannot, thy name Engraved on my heart doth for ever remain: The palms of my hands whilst I look on I see The wounds I received when suffering for thee. (Isaac Watts)***

Now have you not found him? If you have pictured him to your mind’s eye, if you are certain of his presence with you, and then, above all, if you are fully assured of his love, you can say, “I have found him.”

A Jewish marriage is consummated in the room where the bride was conceived (Genesis 24:67^{xxiii}). The language here suggests that when she gets him back in bed with her, it is the honeymoon night all over again. (1:4; 2:4; 3:4 "brought" concludes with intimacy). We are again reminded how important it is to keep our first love burning with passion. We must avoid sinking into routine but should fan the flame of love in all its various expressions. Remember that love begets love (1 John 4:19^{xxiv}). If you desire more love, give more love. If in our relationship with Jesus we want to experience His love to greater extent, we must tear down the barriers we have that keep us from receiving more of His abundant everlasting love for us.

As the bride of Christ, we are to persistently pursue our groom with passion. May we be ever persistently pursuing our Savior and Lover of our souls until the wedding feast of the Lamb when we will never experience a sense of separation. Then there will

be no need to strive to keep the passion alive. Familiarity will not breed complacency but only make our passion stronger. That is because there will forever be more wonders to learn about the greatness and love of our Lord.

See how she held him and would not let him go. It may be that our times of feeling Jesus is not near come from the fact that we have not been clinging to Him. He may give us that sense of being alone to stir within us the desire to commune with Him. She sought him but could not find him. When she found him, she would not let him go until they came "*into the chamber of her who conceived me,*" a reminder of the covenant made by their union on their first night together. She belongs to him, and he belongs to her (1 Corinthians 7:4^{xxv}).

The Scriptures tell us Jerusalem from above is our mother (Galatians 4:26^{xxvi}). And as we read in Revelation we saw New Jerusalem is the bride, the church (Revelation 21:2^{xxvii}). When we find the One whom our soul loves we cling to Him and will not let Him go but bring Him into our mother's chamber. Quoting Spurgeon again: *The Church is the house of God and the mother of our souls. It was under the ministry of the Word that most of us were born to God; it was in the assembly of the saints that we heard the message which first of all quickened us into newness of life; and we may well be content to call the Church of Christ our mother, since our elder Brother — you know his name — when one said to him, "Behold, thy mother and thy brethren stand without, desiring to speak with thee" (Mat. 12:48-50^{xxviii}), pointing to his disciples, he answered, "Behold, my mother, and my brethren. For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother."* Surely, where Jesus chooses to call the assembly of the faithful by the sacred name of mother, we may rightly do the same. If we are the bride of Christ, we will desire to be with Him in our mother's house, the body of believers. It is unnatural for a Christian to abstain from fellowship and is an indication of spiritual sickness, sometimes of unforgiveness and other times of simple selfishness. Either is a serious spiritual malady.

⁵ I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, by the gazelles or the does of the field, that you not stir up or awaken love until it pleases. Song of Songs 3:5 This chorus appears four times in the song (Song 3:5; 5:8,9; 8:4), and in each case it follows the consummation of their love. When the bride sings of these intimate moments that the virgin daughters of Jerusalem desire to experience for themselves, she must remind them to wait until the proper time with the proper man in the confines of marriage. Wildfires are so destructive (Proverbs 6:27^{xxix}), like passion expressed in the wrong place, the wrong time, over the wrong things. The repetition of this warning conveys importance to be heeded. Watch out for that wild stag. He may say all the right things and your knees may grow weak, but there is much more to a lifelong covenant than those feelings. Is he Christlike? Is he willing to commit to you and you alone, to belong to you, until death parts you? Does he have the gentleness and grace you are seeking? Is it the right time in your life? Do your parents approve? Does your family in Christ approve? Remember that when the hormone that causes what we call "falling in love" kicks in, you can be unreasonable. That is why it is even more important to consider the advice of others.

In our life with Jesus, we can answer in the affirmative to each of those questions. The lover of our soul devotes Himself to us, for He has said, I will never leave you or forsake you (Hebrews 13:5^{xxx}). He could not love us more than He does right now for He demonstrated the greatest love of all when He laid down His life for us. He will be with

us to the end and beyond for He loves us with an everlasting love (Psalm 103:17^{xxxvi}). And when we dishonor Him by our words or actions, though he has every right to discard us, He simply wants us to return to Him and repent (Zechariah 1:3^{xxxvii}). We find His love is as it was from the start, without conditions, knowing that He will perfect the work He has begun in us (Philippians 1:6^{xxxviii}).

I close this message with the words of Spurgeon on this passage. *If I turn to what I read about him in this blessed Book, it all makes me love him. If I recall what I have experienced of his grace in my heart, it all makes me love him. When I think of what he is, and what he did, and what he is doing, and what he will yet do, it all makes me love him. I am inclined to say to my heart, "Never beat again if you do not beat true to him." It were better for me that I had never been born, than that I should not love one who is in himself so inconceivably lovely, who is, indeed, perfection itself.*

Yet there is one reason that rises above all others why you and I should love the Lord Jesus Christ; it is this, "He loved me, and gave himself for me." (Gal. 2:20^{xxxix}) If he has loved us with an everlasting love, if he loved us even when we were his enemies, and loved us so as to take upon himself our nature — if this dear Son of God loved us so much that he became man for our sakes, and, being found in fashion as a man, humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross (Phil 2:6-7^{xl}) — oh then, we must love him in return! We would be worse than the beasts that perish if, conscious of such love as this, we did not feel that it melted us, and that, being melted, our soul did not bow out in love to him alone! Can you stand at the foot of the cross and not kiss the feet of him who was wounded for your transgressions? Can you see him dead and taken down from the cross, and not wish to wrap him in your fine linen, and bring your sweet spices to embalm his precious body? Can you see him risen from the grave and not call him "Rabboni" (Jn. 20:16^{xli}), and long, as Mary did, to hold him by the feet? Can you, by faith, see him in our assemblies, saying, "Peace be unto you" (Jn. 20:19^{xlii}, 21^{xliii}, 26^{xliiii}) and not feel that you delight in him in your innermost soul? It cannot be; surely, it cannot be! We must and will say, and we feel that we may appeal to the Searcher of all hearts while we say it — "I love him, I do love him because he first loved me." (1 Jn. 4:19^{xliii}) And I would add that the only reasonable and proper response to the great love with which He loves is to love Him in return, to cling to Him, and never let Him go.

Questions:

- 1 What is the struggle interpreters face in this passage?
- 2 What is in the phrase, "whom my soul loves."
- 3 What is repeated and why?
- 4 Have you ever felt like God had left you?
- 5 Why did she face danger? What does it say to believers today?
- 6 Who found her? What do they represent?
- 7 Why does she cling to Him? Are you clinging to Him?
- 8 Where does she take Him? Significance?
- 9 What is the warning? Why is it found four times in this book?
- 10 Was your heart moved by the final quote from Spurgeon?

ⁱ Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, 397.¹¹ Christopher Wright Mitchell, *The Song of Songs*, Concordia Commentary (Saint Louis: Concordia Pub. House, 2003).

ⁱⁱ **Psalm 121:4 (ESV)**

⁴ Behold, he who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.

ⁱⁱⁱ **Isaiah 55:6 (ESV)**

⁶ "Seek the LORD while he may be found; call upon him while he is near;

^{iv} **1 Samuel 3:10 (NIV)**

¹⁰ The LORD came and stood there, calling as at the other times, "Samuel! Samuel!" Then Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening."

^v **1 Kings 19:12 (KJV)**

¹² And after the earthquake a fire; *but* the LORD *was* not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice.

^{vi} **Psalm 66:18 (KJV)**

¹⁸ If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear *me*:

^{vii} Ted Wuest, *Living as the Beloved*, p.86

^{viii} **Ephesians 2:8 (KJV)**

⁸ For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: *it is* the gift of God:

^{ix} **2 Corinthians 5:7 (ESV)**

⁷ for we walk by faith, not by sight.

^x **Ephesians 6:13 (ESV)**

¹³ Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm.

^{xi} **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.

^{xii} **Matthew 22:37-40 (ESV)**

³⁷ And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. ³⁸ This is the great and first commandment. ³⁹ And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. ⁴⁰ On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets."

^{xiii} **John 21:15 (ESV)**

¹⁵ When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." He said to him, "Feed my lambs."

^{xiv} **James 4:8 (ESV)**

⁸ Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.

^{xv} **Matthew 5:6 (ESV)**

⁶ "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

^{xvi} **Proverbs 8:17 (ESV)**

¹⁷ I love those who love me, and those who seek me diligently find me.

^{xvii} ¹¹ Christopher Wright Mitchell, *The Song of Songs*, Concordia Commentary (Saint Louis: Concordia Pub. House, 2003), 752.

^{xviii} **1 Peter 5:1-2 (ESV)**

¹ So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: ² shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly;

^{xix} **1 Timothy 6:20 (ESV)**

²⁰ O Timothy, guard the deposit entrusted to you. Avoid the irreverent babble and contradictions of what is falsely called "knowledge,"

^{xx} **John 20:17 (ESV)**

¹⁷ Jesus said to her, "Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'"

^{xxi} **John 15:9 (ESV)**

⁹ As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love.

^{xxii} **Isaiah 49:16 (ESV)**

¹⁶ Behold, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands; your walls are continually before me.

^{xxiii} **Genesis 24:67 (ESV)**

⁶⁷ Then Isaac brought her into the tent of Sarah his mother and took Rebekah, and she became his wife, and he loved her. So Isaac was comforted after his mother's death.

^{xxiv} **1 John 4:19 (ESV)**

¹⁹ We love because he first loved us.

^{xxv} **1 Corinthians 7:4 (ESV)**

⁴ For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. Likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does.

^{xxvi} **Galatians 4:26 (ESV)**

²⁶ But the Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother.

^{xxvii} **Revelation 21:2 (ESV)**

² And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

^{xxviii} **Matthew 12:48-50 (ESV)**

⁴⁸ But he replied to the man who told him, "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?"

⁴⁹ And stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers!

⁵⁰ For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother."

^{xxix} **Proverbs 6:27 (KJV)**

²⁷ Can a man take fire in his bosom, and his clothes not be burned?

^{xxx} **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."

^{xxxi} **Psalms 103:17 (ESV)**

¹⁷ But the steadfast love of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear him, and his righteousness to children's children,

^{xxxii} **Zechariah 1:3 (ESV)**

³ Therefore say to them, Thus declares the LORD of hosts: Return to me, says the LORD of hosts, and I will return to you, says the LORD of hosts.

^{xxxiii} **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.

^{xxxiv} **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.

^{xxxv} **Philippians 2:6-7 (ESV)**

⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped,

⁷ but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.

^{xxxvi} **John 20:16 (ESV)**

¹⁶ Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned and said to him in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means Teacher).

^{xxxvii} **John 20:19 (ESV)**

¹⁹ On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you."

^{xxxviii} **John 20:21 (ESV)**

²¹ Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you."

^{xxxix} **John 20:26 (ESV)**

²⁶ Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you."

^{xl} **1 John 4:19 (ESV)**

¹⁹ We love because he first loved us.