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Wisdom and the Problem of Intimacy. by Ben M.
Song of Solomon 1:1-4

The Song of Solomon is such a difficult book to preach on because it is hard to talk about intimate things in a public setting. This is the book I was reading to my father as he was passing from this life. He was saying, 'Beautiful! Beautiful!'. This is the book I read to my bride at the beginning of our marriage. It's the book Charles Spurgeon preached from at communion services because communion is about intimacy with God: the preciousness of knowing him and of him drawing near to us. This is the book that was being read at Passover as the Lord Jesus kissed our sinful world with an incredible and intimate love that touches and transforms our lives completely. You get the sense of intimacy in the opening lines, "Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth for your love is more delightful than wine. Pleasing is the fragrance of your perfumes; your name is like perfume poured out. No wonder the young women love you! Take me away with you; let us hurry! Let the king bring me into his chambers." This is a heart pulsating for deep rich spiritual communion.

If Job is a book of serious philosophical investigation into suffering and faith set in dramatic form then the Song of Solomon is like a romantic Italian opera where singers pour out their hearts expressing deep, rich romantic emotions set against a backdrop of choruses who chime in and contribute to the drama. Right from the beginning the Shulamite woman is crying for affection and love and intimacy. This is not about twenty-first century recreational sex. It does not discount the physical aspects but it is about what stands behind all this. It is about love. She says his love is better than wine. Ecclesiastes 10:19 says, ...and wine gladdens the heart', but Proverbs tells us it can make a fool out of you. It can do you harm. Love will only do you good. She is not in love with love, she is in love specifically with him, who has drawn out all this affection, openness, vulnerability and desire for him. This guy is the heart throb of the nation and all the other girls agree with her. He's got it all: famous song writer of 1,005 songs, writer of 3,000 proverbs, smart, clever, articulate, well turned out in all his glory, with more gold than anybody else and drop-dead-gorgeous. She says, 'love me back.'

Intimacy requires singularity. You want to shut out the world and be shut in with the one that you love. As Christians we want to be shut in with Jesus Christ. But Solomon is not Jesus Christ. She is in love with a married man. That's a bit of an understatement! (3:11) At this time in his life Solomon has sixty queens and eighty concubines. (6:8) By the end of his marital career he has 700 wives of royal birth and 300 concubines. So, where does the Shulamite woman fit in?, She's not of royal blood. She's a country girl. So would she be concubine 301? Is this an acceptable kind of relationship? Principally, Solomon formed political alliances making him more married to his in-laws than he was to his wives. The concubines were no more than slaves, picked up and added to the royal household to have babies for the queens who didn't want to put her waistline out of shape. 1Kings 11:1- 2 tells us he loved his wives. He looked after them but out of 1,000 relationships not one of them loved the Lord. They were all committed to other gods and cults. Gradually Solomon's singular love for God became diluted and spread so thinly that he was loving not only lots of different women but lots of different gods. The kingdom became more and more polytheistic. As the intimacy between Solomon and his wives becomes more diluted so his intimacy with God becomes more diluted. The world encroaches on his heart and takes over.

Solomon dedicates his love song to this beautiful Shulamite woman but it's all about her outward appearance, not her character. She is just another object to a man who is a collector. He likens her to flocks on Mount Gilead, the cleft in the rock and pomegranates. It's all about the simple life where you can be alone with nature in the land of 'milk and honey' (her lips). He has been so committed to the complexities of politics that he has almost lost touch with what God has given him right under his feet. This beautiful Israelite woman reminds him of his childhood days visiting his grandfather's farm where his father kept sheep and wrote 'The Lord is my shepherd'. He has moved away from who he is but when he sees her he remembers. There is a sadness here, a loss of intimacy and simplicity. Solomon's heart is so divided he cannot give himself to her as he should. He is living with the consequences of his sin. His capacity for intimacy is being diluted and diluted because his relationship with God is not what it could and should be.

When we read the Song of Solomon it is a bit like a pop-star and a fan who when young used to muck about on the farm together. They were sweet hearts but then life takes over and suddenly they are miles apart. When they meet they want to connect but they can't because they have lost their innocence. We all have that memory of the Garden of Eden where life was simple but we can't go back there. The garden has been lost. It's heart-breaking. Relationship difficulties are the most painful experiences to human beings.

The way forward is to remember that when God made you and me, men and women, we were not made to satisfy the deepest longings and needs of the human heart. The only one who can satisfy that deepest need and longing is God himself. We become idolatrous when we expect people to be to us what only God can be. Every human being is made to have an intimate relationship with God. In Genesis Adam is living in a land of thorns. He's lost his innocence and his intimacy with his wife and with God. He complains, 'The woman that you gave me...' It's her fault, she's not good enough. God reminds him (verse 3:16) the woman will fulfil her purpose. From her will come the Christ. Christ will triumph and there will be grace and there will be forgiveness. All is well. Christ is enough. This applies to all our relationships: parents, friends, government, each other in church. We need to remember Jesus is enough to cover all the gaps and frustrations. He meets our needs. Jesus is our single-hearted king. He is devoted to every single one of his people. He laid his life down on the cross, the worst of all deaths, a broken body, spilt blood, the love of God to heal the broken hearted. When we are frustrated, angry and blue Jesus is always enough. Sometimes we roam around looking to fill the gap. We need to look for Jesus. Jesus is looking for us. When we are with him and he is with us, all is well. In those moments of dissatisfaction, of hunger and thirst, Jesus is enough to meet all our deepest needs. Hear the voice of Jesus in Revelation 3:20, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me." *Intimate fellowship with God.*