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Song of Songs

A Daily Devotional

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2015

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Day 1

Song of Songs 1:1-10

“Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth.”

You need to be close to be kissed. You need to be in the family. You need intimacy to be kissed. To be in the family of God means you have been born into it. Just like we are born into our earthly families, we need to be born again of the Spirit. And who gives this Spirit? It is Jesus alone. He sends His Spirit into all who look to him for Life. “He gave the right to become the children of God to everyone who believed in him.” (John 1:12)

“Your love is more delightful than wine.”

Wine intoxicates. It lifts us up from the trials and battles of this life. We need breaks from the harshness of this life. His love is like this, lifting us up and strengthening our hearts.

Having filled my senses of feeling and tasting, I smell His fragrance.

“Your name is like poured out perfume.”

“Take me away with you. The King has brought me into His private rooms.” Go to His chambers. To be close to the King you have to be invited into His dwelling place. Since He has created us, doesn't He deserve this right to know us and us to know Him? How else will we know His will and go where He would have us go?

Jesus, we rejoice and delight in you. We will praise your love more than wine. We are addicted to your love. We cannot go on without it.

“Dark am I, yet lovely.”

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No one draws close to the LORD without sensing their own darkness, for we all fall short. This is not a casual glance that we sense and walk away feeling forever good. No, this is a life battle. When I abide in Him, His goodness flows; when I am in control, darkness returns, black as night and dark as ink.

“Do not stare at me, because I am dark.”

I was born this way. I increase this way by living in a fallen world. In taking care of others I have neglected taking care of myself, for focusing on others relieves my personal pain. This is perhaps a point of confusion for those who set out to serve God. We can get so focused on the work that we forget the most important thing, and that is to know the One we serve. There is a vast difference between service that comes out of abiding in Him and service that is hectic, frantic, full of self and self-promotion. Only those who spend time alone with God are able to serve in this level of freedom and sonship. You will know which kind of servant you are when He removes you from your position. Is it just as nice to worship in the back row as up front? Can you enjoy your times alone with Him as much as leading a Bible study? Does the number of people in attendance make or break your day? We have all struggled to be free from self. Here though the maiden is purely attracted to her King. This is the joy and beauty of the first love that God desires we hang on to throughout our days on earth.

“Tell me Jesus, where do you graze your flock?”

I want to be near You. I want to belong to You.

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"Why should I be like the veiled woman, one separated and outside, when there is a flock full of Your sheep? I want to be as one of them."

His flock is transparent, noticed, cared for, and fed by the King.

"I liken you to a mare of Pharaoh's chariots"

One time a friend told me about a man who had a dream about horses. It was a dream like this: Wild horses were running free and wild. They were so powerful and beautiful, but the King could not use them because they were not tamed. There were also some wild horses that had been brought into the King's fields. He let them graze on fine grass. He takes good care of them. Some are not used to Him and they stay along the fence. But, some were so trained, so disciplined, so well acquainted with the King that they pull His chariot. The slightest nudge on the reigns and they know which way He wants them to turn. The LORD here is calling the maiden forth to begin the road that will lead her to be one of these who pull His chariot.

Thank you, Father, for bringing me close enough to be one who pulls your chariot. Make me earrings of gold, pierce my ears. Oh, Father, let it show in my speech. You know this is the desire of my heart.

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Day 2

Song of Songs 1:12-17

“While the King was at his table my perfume spread its fragrance.”

Yes, I too brought pleasure to my King. I too carried a pleasant fragrance for Him. For I carry a “sachet of myrrh between my breasts.”

Myrrh is a low-lying bush that grows in the Arabian Peninsula. When this main stem (the vine) is cut it forms golden amber teardrops from its sap. This, when crushed, provides the fragrance used in the temple worship, brought at Jesus’ birth and death. Nicodemus brought 75 pounds of myrrh and aloes to prepare his body. Jesus was wounded for my transgressions. He was bruised for my iniquities and suffered for me. How can I forget this? I carry this in my heart, the fragrance of my suffering Lord.

“My lover is a cluster of henna blossoms.”

The henna blossoms are small white flowers grown in Solomon’s vineyards. They were fragrant. Only foreigners would crush the leaves to dye their hair and skin.

“How handsome you are, your eyes are doves’ eyes”
Doves’ eyes: When the dove fixes its eyes on its mate it doesn’t notice any other activity that is going on around it. It is known as the lovebird. To have such single focus means an ever-increasing awareness of the LORD’s presence. This spiritual awareness lifts us above the pulls of the earth. Such sensitivity leads us to obedience to His desires and purposes.

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“Our bed is verdant”. This is green covered with growing plants. Growing and alive, full of beauty and a refreshing place is our relationship to Jesus.

Lord, if my walk with you is verdant then it is because of your loving kindness. Thank you for being so patient with me. Open my eyes to more of you lest my wandering heart makes big mistakes or the same little ones over and over. Help! Psalm 17:3 “You have probed my heart. You have confronted me at night. You have tested me like silver; but you found nothing wrong. I have determined that my mouth will not sin.” I have a tendency to take on the accent, the very character of those I spend time with. This is wonderful if they are people of character, but when they are weak (gossipy or critical) this too comes on me. Strengthen me in your soberness. Drive me deep into your Word, that as my best and closest friend I take on your character alone.

Day 3

Song of Songs 1:8-10

“Follow the tracks of the sheep and graze your goats by the tents of the shepherds.” Song of Songs 1:8

We notice when someone knows the Shepherd well and we follow them. We follow the steps of those who have gone before and become a learner for life... but deep down we long to go deeper and farther. We long to go beyond and seek your face for ourselves.

“Your cheeks are lovely with ornaments, your neck with strings of pearls.” Song of Songs 1:10

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Exodus 21:5-6 “But if he makes this statement: ‘I hereby declare my love for my master; my wife, and my children. I don’t want to leave as a free man,’ then his master must bring him to Elohim. The master must bring him to the door or the doorframe and pierce his ear with an awl. Then he will be his slave for life.”

Every time we choose to do things God’s way, to chose the path of love and life rather than our own way of self-preservation we will be proclaiming to the universe around us that we belong to the Living God. Pearls are formed in the oyster when it is irritated by sand. Our best gifts to the LORD come when we are under stress and we choose to trust Him right through the experience. Hold onto His hand tightly, and walk it out.

My worst fear in Turkey was that I would hit someone with my car. I remember the day this fear came upon me. We were walking out of a restaurant on a busy divided street. A man rushing home with a loaf of bread in his arms ran into the street without looking first and was hit by a fast moving car. He crunched up his body like a bug and flew through the air. I watched in horror and thought, “Tonight two people’s lives and families are changed forever. One has lost a father, and one has a father going to jail.” It was about 5 years later that I would find myself in the same place as the driver of that car. I was heading home from work late as we were leaving to go to Sweden the next day. My friend was in the car with me when 2 people entered the highway in front of us to get to the other side.

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I saw them and noticed at the rate they were walking they would make it if I slowed down, which I did. However, I had not anticipated that the young man would stop in the middle lane and that the woman would come to a complete stop in my lane to look back and ask him why he was stopping. Then my choice was to hit one of them or both of them. I chose one, and, though I slammed on my brakes, hit the lady who rolled up onto my windshield and then down to the pavement. I sat in shock and remember telling my friend this is what I had most feared in my days in Turkey. I then heard the LORD tell me to get out and comfort the young man. He was talking into a cell phone and crying. The lady had gotten up and walked to the side of the road. I asked him if he was ok and was that his mother. He said it was his aunt. "Well, it is a good sign that she got up and walked to the side, don't you think?" He stopped crying at that. A policeman stopped and took both of them to a nearby hospital warning me to stay put. His advice was foolish since we were in the far left lane of a busy highway with no lights or signs of distress. As we sat there my friend suggested we get out of the car before we became the next accident. We did so, but someone slammed on their brakes to avoid us and got hit from behind. It was a long evening waiting for the hospital report. When the police returned he said to me, "Come with me, you are going to jail. I have the hospital report right here. She is dead." I reached for my purse to follow him and he yelled gruffly, "There's no time for that!"

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When I turned around confused he started to laugh and said, "I was just joking, she is ok." It was at that point I burst into tears. I insisted on seeing the lady and telling her how very sorry I was.

The miracle was the family did not press charges. They offered me tea instead of hitting me with slippers as I had imagined. The Turkish government would continue the case and 6 months later I would go to court. As I waited in the outer room for my case to be tried all I could think about was Hebrews 4:16. I didn't want justice or mercy; I wanted pure grace. And grace was what I got as the outer room emptied with no one left but me. "This is strange," the lawyer said, "I will go see what is happening." He then ducked into the courtroom, closing the door behind him. After a few minutes, which seemed like hours, he poked his head out and said, "The case has been dropped. You can go home."

This is what I am expecting to happen when we stand there on Judgment Day. We won't want justice and we won't want mercy. We shall be hoping for grace. Our Advocate will poke his glorious head out and say, "The case has been dropped. Enter in."

Day 4

Song of Songs 2:1-2

"I am a rose of Sharon, a lily of the valley."

"Like a lily among thorns, so is my true love among the young women."

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On the Internet pictures the rose of Sharon is a brightly colored large flower. But the rose of Sharon that my daughter-in-law brought me from Jerusalem is a rough looking plant, curled up and dry, that can endure the dry season. It almost looks like a miniature tumbleweed which opens up with layers like lacy petals when watered. It is found in the desert places of Israel. The lily of the valley is quite the opposite. This plant grows best in shaded moist areas. It has large green leaves and the flowers grow on a slender stem and look like little white bells. The flowers weigh the stem down a bit so it perfectly bends like a shepherd's cane.

I, as a believer, am like this. He calls me a lily among thorns, for so is the believer in a world that is full of rebellion and idolatry. Those who know the Good Shepherd are able to bloom when well watered and shaded or when in the hot dry seasons of their life. Like the rose of Sharon we know that we will be watered soon and wait for that time. Then we soak up all the goodness He pours on us and spread our arms wide, speaking our praise in the congregation. We are well cared for.

Song of Songs 2:3 states that Jesus is our apple tree. He gives shade, nourishment, and health to all who find Him. Each apple is capable of planting so many trees, so many apples on each tree. Jesus alone is the fruitful one who brings fruitfulness to each life entrusted to Him. It is refreshing to "sit in His shade." The only place on earth that provides lasting refreshment and healing is under His tree.

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I feast with Him and fill up on His love, over, under, and all around me. Strengthen and refresh me, Jesus. I will stay pressed close into your heart.

Our hearts are prone to wander, to focus and love that which will destroy and pierce our hearts. Therefore it says, "Don't arouse or awaken love until it so desires." The One my heart loves comes in the morning and even in the night watches. He says,

"Arise my darling,
My beautiful one,
Come with Me."

Jesus is the place for fruitfulness. He sees me as beautiful. No critical or harsh words come to his lips. Nothing unkind or destructive assaults me from His mouth. Time with Him transforms our heart, mind, and mouth. He wants to see my face full on, and to hear my voice. He wants me to catch those things that are stealing our fruit and ruining the vineyard:

Unforgiveness
Worry
Doubt
Insecurities
Unbelief

Notice that the loved one stays with her beloved through the night, when all is quiet. He awakens us to sit and listen to His voice, to experience the love of our King. God's love is always deeper than any pit the enemy can set to entrap us.

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Day 5

Song of Songs 3:1-4

"Night after night on my bed

I looked for the one I love

I looked for Him but did not find him."

Jesus touches our lives, but we must follow. I remember the first night I felt His love, His forgiveness (for the two are intertwined). Oct. 11, 1977 God loved me. It had been preceded by times of Scripture opening up to me with insight and understanding that only He can give (Job7:17-18 and Phil 2:2-3 were the passages He used to speak directly to me) Yet that night I felt His Presence, the peace that passes all understanding and the inner assurance that I had been accepted, loved, cleansed and set on a new road. Life from then until now consists of seeking the One I love. I love to hear stories of others who have found Him, and I will travel many miles to find Him. I love to draw close to music that ushers me into His throne room and will listen to the same CD over and over to get into His Presence. I will drive across town or fly across a country to join others who know how to get into His Presence, to listen to His heart and intercede for the things that grieve His heart. I will leave all that is precious to me:

A career

A home

A family: mother, father, sisters, children

Familiarity

Traditions

Habits

Selfishness

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to be able to hear His voice and live a life that pleases Him.

“I asked, ‘Have you seen the One I love?’”

But He is found alone, when I am silent and still in the early hours of the dawn, or the late hours of the night.

“I had just left them...when I found the One I love.” He loves to be found! He wants to be with me too! The heat of His Presence covers my head and travels down my back as if He has come up from behind and is leaning over to see what I have written.

“I held on to Him and would not let Him go.”

Throughout the day I can run back to the new insight or word of refreshment I found that morning. Isaiah 50:4 comes to life for me. “The Lord has given me the tongue of those who are taught, that I may know how to sustain with a word him who is weary. Morning by morning he awakens; he awakens my ear to hear as those who are taught.”

“I would not let go until I had brought Him into my mother’s house.”

Who can find such a treasure and not tell others? We long for those we love to taste His goodness. There is nothing like it! Others must know. Yet we appear foolish at first, and then a threat as we continue. We suffer rejection...but it is the rejection of the King. It is good for us to be on His side. They will not reject us forever, for He is lovely and utterly worthy of worship by everything that has life or breath all day everyday. Who would not love Him?

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Day 7

Song of Songs 2:8

“I hear my beloved’s voice,”

Psalm 45:1 “My heart is overflowing with good news. I will direct my song to the King. My tongue is the pen of a ready writer.”

The religious would like us to think God no longer speaks to His children...that His voice is limited to Words already recorded in Scripture, canonized centuries ago.

I’m afraid this is not so and this belief takes a vibrant believer and turns them into a bitter religious “older brother” hating others who have discovered grace. No, our God made us for Himself. We, unlike monkeys and apes, can walk with Him.

It is this still small voice that gives us insight and wisdom. The Holy Spirit is our counselor, but if God no longer speaks to us, how would we know how to apply His Truth to our lives in specific areas?

One time I had a Turkish friend who challenged me, “Devri, you always speak of the things the LORD is teaching you. Why doesn’t he speak to me?”

Such statements concern me, as all God’s children need to be listening and hearing His voice. I’ve heard that some have heard His audible voice, but this is not how I hear Him. Sometimes He uses a verse and grants insight in how it applies to me personally. I have had conversations with the LORD while I lie on my bed at night. His counsel revealed insight into my great pain. I was suffering from a backache that was so piercing that I had to crawl to get to the bathroom. As I laid

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there on my bed at night He said to me:

“Why don’t you ask Me to heal you?”

“Because I don’t want to see how weak my faith is when I don’t get healed. And I guess I just expect life will have its aches and pains.”

“You have been wounded deeply in your heart.”

“Yes.”

“When others treat you badly you act like it doesn’t matter. This is lying.”

“I thought I was behaving like a Christian...turning the other cheek”.

“No, you are putting on a mask. Do you know why you do that?”

“No.”

“Pride.”

“Pride?”

“Yes, pride. You do not want them to know they have the power to hurt you.”

The conversation ended as abruptly as it started. I know God’s voice because He has thoughts I’ve never had. Also, the conversation bore His signature because the following morning my back was healed.

Oh, and my Turkish friend? About 17 years later, after she repented of deep habitual sin, lost her job, and became desperate, she began to hear His voice for herself. She reads the Word daily, has insights, specific corrections, encouragements, and dreams that are prophetic.

One time my boys challenged me with the comment, “You always speak like the Lord talks to you. Why doesn’t he talk to us?” Their words were hurtful and

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coming more out of unbelief and challenge than out of an inquiring mind.

“I don’t know why, because God’s children hear His voice, (John 10:10) but I will ask the LORD and tell you tomorrow.”

What the Lord showed me broke my heart. He said, “My arms are opened to them longing to embrace them, but they are standing with their backs to me, facing and loving the world.” (1 John 2:15-17) That was when they were teenagers. Now they are men who know how to walk with God. They discern His will and hear His voice directly for themselves.

The difficult part about this is that there are three sources, three voices if you will permit me to say it that way, vying for our attention. Our job is to simply discern which is God’s and obey it. God’s voice is easily discernible if you are close to Him. One time I was in a huge shopping mall. I heard my mom’s laugh. I did not know she was in that store, but as soon as I heard that laugh I walked toward it to find her. There she stood with a bag of popcorn as long as her arm. The size of it had made her laugh. I knew her voice because of living together for many years. As we read God’s Word we recognize His voice. It is always wise, insightful, and full of loving-kindness. Even when He is correcting us it is kind and instructive.

Satan’s voice is the opposite. It is deceitful, lying, accusative, and belittling. You always feel tired and uncomfortable in your soul after listening. Self-thoughts, whether these are unrighteous, judgmental, filled with insecurity, worry, or fear, or just

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plain, old logic, they will never get us where God wants us. They increase anxiety, confusion, and despair.

Let's turn our eyes and hope to Jesus alone. It reminds me of a saying by Corrie ten Boom:

“Look around and get distressed,

“Look inside and get depressed,

“Look to Jesus and be at rest.”

Day 8

Song of Songs 2:2

“Like a lily among thorns, so is my true love among the young women.”

Phil2: 13-15 “It is God who produces in you the desires and actions that please Him. Do everything without complaining or arguing. Then you will be blameless and innocent. You will be God's children without faults among people who are crooked and corrupt.”

This is the second chapter of Song of Songs. She is still immature, yet Jesus sees her as a lily. His love is kindled from the moment we turn toward Him. It is from His abundant grace, and not thwarted by our immaturity.

I have failed so many times with my mouth, complaining, arguing over anything and everything with Dan. Yet Jesus loves me now! There will be a day when I will be so peaceful on the inside, so trusting that He is working His purpose out, that my words will be kind and all complaining will stop.

How can I be sure?

He promises me He will perfect that which concerns

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Jesus NEVER fails.

He promises He will complete the good work He has started in me. (Philippians 1:6)

Let your confidence in Him soar today.

Day 9

Song of Songs 2:4-5

“He leads me to His banqueting table and looks at me with love. Strengthen me with raisins and refresh me with apples, because I am weak from love.”

Again, God is active here. It is God who seeks us. We hide, He seeks us out as surely as He sought out Adam and Eve in the garden. He knows why we do the destructive things we do and has the only solution for us.

We will never be changed by trying harder or by belittling ourselves. We don't get into painful self-destructive habits using logic and we don't get out that way either. We change when He leads us out of our mess by His grace and fills us up with His good things. That must be why Paul said to “put off” and “put on”. Jesus' love walks toward us when we are the most vile and disgusting and aware of it...and feeds us His grace

His love

His forgiveness

His hope

His truth

His compassion

His cleansing blood

His Word

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This comes in many ways: a sermon, a book, a new thought while praying, a friend, a kind action, a dream or vision, a movie, something in nature. He is not limited to the Bible, but uses His Word so powerfully, and all things He uses will line up with something He has said in His Word. You'll know it is Him, because it strengthens and refreshes like nothing this world has to offer.

How then can it leave me "weak from love?" God never flatters, slanders, or encourages self-confidence. His words, messages, and insights always lead us to greater dependence on Him. We will be quicker to pray if we realize He has the answers. We will be faster to repent when we discover His ways work! We will spend more time in prayer and fasting when we watch Him unravel mysteries and break bondage.

Yes, His work in my life: that results in love, always weakens self and increases and strengthens our God-focus.

Day 10

Song of Songs 2:6

"His left hand is under my head, His right hand caresses me."

When Dan's left hand is under my head I cannot see it. God gives so many blessings to the just and the unjust, that we are often unaware of them. Who gives thanks for healthy teeth? Until you have a toothache you are completely unaware of them; yet you use them everyday.

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This week we have moved into a beautiful villa in Northern Cyprus. Mountains out our bedroom window and the sea out the kitchen and dining room windows decorate our world. Massive clouds billow up for breathtaking lightening storms, and I marvel that I get to be here to see it. However, I wonder about those who have lived here for years. Is it possible that they no longer marvel at the display of His power and beauty? Do I take Dan (his incredible ability to solve problems and his unending energy to help others) for granted?

They say “familiarity breeds contempt”. We stop being fascinated by something we see too often. Lord, keep me from doing this with salvation, with Your death on the cross, or Your Holy Spirit leading, guiding, comforting, and correcting. Judge me now lest I perish in ungratefulness.

God’s right hand caresses us. We see it. A verse pops out at us giving wisdom and understanding in how to apply it to our situation. He answers our prayer for help and provides finances in miraculous ways and heals us when we are desperate for His touch.

I remember spending a week in Israel when the left side of my face began to hurt. A Turkish dentist had put a bridge on a tooth that was still infected in the root. The infection over the years went right up into the bone (which had to be scraped, ouch!) But during that week in Israel when the pain was too much to bear Derek and Dan (my son and husband) would lay their hands on my face and pray for me.

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The pain would subside. What grace. To me these were the obvious blessings of His right hand.

Father, grant me a grateful heart. Grant me an awareness of your blessings, and an attitude of wonder at all you do for me that I cannot see. Grant me eyes to see what you see. I want to abide in Your Presence today.

Day 11

Song of Songs 2: 10

“Get up my true love, my beautiful one and come with me. “

How good it is to hear the Lord’s voice calling us into service. The first chapter is about her finding Him, or rather, His coming for her. She is ashamed of her appearance. We feel so much guilt and shame before He cleanses us with His blood.

I remember the first love, I wept without knowing why. Deep sobs, unashamed for once. The lady who had prayed with me had disappeared right after we prayed. She melted into the crowd and I would only see her once again 3 months later, by chance, but she would not remember me. Phyllis Anderson, I shall look for you in heaven to say thank you for reaching out and pulling me from the flames of hell into LIFE.

My soul knew something my mind could not grasp. With that one plea for help, with that one encounter with someone who knew You, I was delivered up to the throne of grace. My life was NEVER the same. That night waves of peace and joy flooded my soul.

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I couldn't wait to tell my mom what had happened. Yet as I shared she looked at me so strangely I assumed that my outward appearance had changed as well. But a quick run to the bathroom and I saw that I was quite the same on the outside, except perhaps for the puffy eyes from crying. In reality the look of strangeness was more due to the fact that I had become an alien in my own home. The enemy had lost me, light had entered that house and a war against the darkness had begun.

Actually, the war had begun when my older sister, Laura, had come to Christ. However, she was quiet and did not share her faith openly at first. Quietly she interceded for us, so the LORD used Phyllis to pray with me. He was answering Laura's prayers.

That night all that was vile, disgusting, and broken from the past was washed off of me and I was set on a new road. A honeymoon with Jesus began. Daily I discovered the joy of hearing His voice and walking in His peace. It lasted for about 2 years. During that time I moved in with my Grandma. Wherever the new believer goes there is a battle with darkness, but always, especially in those first 2 years, always is the underlying joy and peace. Jesus is feeding the new believer with raisins and apples, the fresh sweetness of His Presence.

Then, He calls her to arise and come with Him, to go to the mountains, to leave the place of familiarity and comfort... For me, it was to leave the pew and go serve the four year olds during the women's study. In my mind Jill Briscoe, the leader of that study, had come up

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to me and asked me what I was doing in the women's ministry.

I had been coming for over a year and it was a life line for me. I was faithful. However, years later when I spoke with Jill she not only didn't remember this conversation, she felt it would be most unlike her to do that. However, it was enough for me to volunteer to serve. It sounds easy, teaching 4 year olds. But there were 60 of them, no curriculum, and some of the children were not happy to be there! I would make many mistakes. For example, I decided to make candles (60 children, 3 adults to help, and hot wax? What was I thinking?) But the joy in preparation, the sense of His Presence and love was so strong.

It is good to follow Him when He calls. Mark 8:34-38 "Then Yeshua called the crowd to himself along with his disciples. He said to them, "Those who want to follow me must say no to the things they want, pick up their crosses, and follow me. Those who want to save their lives will lose them. But those who lose their lives for me and for the Good News will save them. What good does it do for people to win the whole world yet lose their lives? Or what should a person give in exchange for life? If people are ashamed of me and what I say in this unfaithful and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of those people when he comes with the holy angels in his Father's glory." Lord, I really like to be comfortable and in a place I'm used to. But you say it is better to follow you to the mountains, the places of trial, and where I don't always

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feel in control.

Thank you that you know best, that you are good, and that you go through every trial right there with me, ever encouraging, and ever giving the wisdom I need. Have your way today, Lord. I choose to follow, all day, everyday.

Day 12

Song of Songs 1:11-14

“While the King is at his table, my perfume fills the air with its fragrance.

My Beloved is a pouch of myrrh that lies between my breasts.

My Beloved is a bouquet of henna flowers in the vineyards of En Gedi.”

The bride is bubbling over in response to all her King has done for her. This is the first love mentioned in Rev 2:2-5 The church had worked hard, had endured testing, had discerned and cast out wicked people, had tested “apostles” and discerned who was false. They had actually thrown out the liars. These are difficult feats. It means they honored God more than man. They were close enough to His heart to discern what was evil. They were united enough to cast out the liar instead of being cast out by him.

Bravo. All these feats are difficult. If you have made church planting your life’s work, then you will know how very difficult it is to do all this and guard your ‘love walk’. They had suffered trouble because of the name of Jesus and not grown weary.

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We know this, having been used by God in the establishing of 2 churches and a school in a Muslim country. Warriors? We know what it is to stay up late and get up early to do warfare praying. We know how to sing warrior proclamations of our king.

A lovely, gentle Bible teacher from my home church visited to speak at a women's conference we were organizing. As we began to worship she leaned over and said, "There is something different about this worship, but I can't quite put my finger on it. After a few more worship songs she looked at me and said, "I know what it is. There is a battle cry in the worship. I am in the midst of warriors worshipping the Commander of Hosts."

Such battles and fighting tends to make us 'crusty'. We are not weary of fighting, just less warm and fuzzy. We lose our first love.

"God is love. Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God and everyone that loves is born of God and knows God, he that loves not, knows not God, for God is love. So brethren, let us love one another." (I John 4:7-8)

No one serving the living God can go very long before they discover the need to carve out time to be alone with Him. Some do this 2-5 hours a day. Some choose a day a week to just be alone with Him. This is the only way to maintain your love walk. Without it you will grow weary and faint. You will be like the five foolish bridesmaids who used up their oil. They burned up all they had before their life was over. (Matthew 25:1-13)

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Don Potter mentioned that it was after the Holy Spirit came upon Jesus as is written in Luke 4:18-19 that He began to use the anointing that was upon Him already. In serving if we use the Holy Spirit power we will never run out of oil. But if we are using up our gifting we will be like the foolish virgins completely dry when we need it the most. The anointing is already there, but the Holy Spirit activates it. God Himself uses us as He designed us.

To have this happen, He must have all of us. He must have our attention and receive all the glory. This is the difference between selfish-ambition and being zealous for the house of God.

Lord, let this first love ever burn bright in our hearts. Let the myrrh of death to self remain at the very heart of our service and your fragrance spill out wherever we go today. Live your life in us, a whole banquet of good things that is ours in Christ. In light of all you accomplished on the cross, I must be important to You. Take what is yours today.

Day 13

Song of Songs 2:15

“Catch the little foxes for us, the little foxes that ruin the vineyards. Our vineyards are blooming.”

(This is the King speaking to the bride.)

Yesterday I visited a neighbor that we lived next door to 3 months ago. She was kind, helpful, accepting, and loving. She is a Turkish Muslim. Because I came unannounced her home was a disaster area. It is not

always like that, but there were 2 girls and a husband home, and this was the last day of a 10 day holiday. Yet, she greeted me with joy. I waited for her phone call to end, (a lonely neighbor who would call back shortly after that call, even knowing she had a guest). As a good Turk she immediately began making coffee and slicing me some cake. We sat and shared news from here and there and I wondered, would I have been able to welcome a guest into my messy house and focus on what they were saying? Only if the “self-fox” was caught. She was not focused on what I thought of her. She was focused on me, her guest.

God uses many people, books, movies, and events to point out our foxes. I used to think this was a once in life experience for the believer, and then they moved on to maturity. But now I know that these foxes are sneaky. They are small, fast, and quick to hide. They are a daily problem.

There are so many, too many possibilities to list, but they all have one thing in common: they ruin the vineyard. So whether these are the foxes of a new believer’s walk (like ignorance, TV, or self-righteousness) or the foxes of the older believer (unrighteous judgment, cynicism, and doubt) they destroy our vineyard.

Yes, **our** vineyard, for the LORD is so generous as to give us a plot of land to work in His great kingdom. What is the fruit that He is growing? I’ll bet everyone knows the answer! The fruit is that in all seasons, in the heat of the day or the cool of the night; in the midst

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of the battle or the time to rest, the fruit of the Spirit is evident in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. When the foxes of worry, doubt, and unbelief are raging through the vineyard these fruit are eaten off and anyone walking through will find nothing of God to eat.

A song comes to my mind. It is sung by Cindy Ruakere so beautifully and rings through my mind when I wonder how I will catch these foxes:

“Only by grace, can this ever be done, to lay my life down, as a gift from the Son, and to the Lamb, who stands among us as king, to give up my life, to give up my life as an offering, that the Lamb may receive the reward for His suffering, that the Lamb, may receive His reward, through me. Hallelujah!

So, when aware of a fox, use His name and banish it. We don't have to allow it to stray. We are the keepers of our own gardens.

Day 14

Song of Songs 2:16

“My beloved is mine and I AM HIS. He is the One who grazes His flock among the lilies.”

As I think about the foxes I realize how the Shepherd was empowering the believer to victory. This is an important fundamental truth. On the cross Jesus gained back the keys to the kingdom and He hands them back to the believer.

This bride is convinced the King is hers. Not as a serf to a distant lord, but as a Bride! He is mine!

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He grazes His flock among the lilies.” The declaration is necessary for the battle ahead. “My beloved is mine and I AM HIS. He is the One who, as I think about the foxes, I realize how the Shepherd empowers the believer to victory. This is an important fundamental truth. On the cross Jesus gained back the keys to the kingdom and He hands them back to the believer.

We need to have this deeply set in our hearts before we will have victory over the darkness in the battles that will rage throughout our lives. Especially the end times believers. We need to prepare our children for the battles coming in the last days.

These two lines will be repeated in this song right after her greatest battle in the Song of Songs chapter 5. It is this truth that will keep us stable. The disciples forgot it in the storm when they cried out, “Lord! Save us we’re going to die!” (Matthew 8:25) He had plans for them to rise up and do the things he had done, so He gave them another chance. He sent them out into a storm without Him. (Matthew 14:22-32) But again the experience resulted in fear and Peter saying, “Lord, save me.”

No worry, Peter would lose his fear when the Holy Spirit comes upon him, so much so, that he would sleep while awaiting a death sentence. John the Baptist had been beheaded; Stephan had been stoned; James had just been executed; yet Peter slept.

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He knew who he belonged to and that his goal in life was not to live as long as possible, but to LIVE the life God had for him as long as God wanted. He had kingdom peace because the focus was no longer self-preservation, but King focus. He trusted His Savior. So, where am I today? Am I still crying out, "Lord, save me!" or am I resting confident that "I am my Beloved's and He is mine."

Day 15

Song of Songs 2:17

The groom had said, "Get up, my true love my beautiful one, and come with me." (Song of Songs 2:10)

And now she says, "When the day brings a cooling breeze and the shadows flee, turn around my Beloved. Run like a gazelle or a young stag on the mountains that separate us!" (Song of Songs 2:17)

There comes a time in our walk that the LORD calls us to serve. The time for sitting in the pew and soaking up His Presence is not enough. He wants us to go out of our safe place and follow Him to the heights. Because His voice is an inner voice we want to ignore it and dismiss it as if it is not His voice. Surely He wouldn't be asking me to leave this safe place. She loves to see Him do what He is good at: running across the mountains of impossibilities. Who can stop God? He is good at everything! Of course, she wants to watch Him be excellent at what He does. "Nothing is impossible for God." Even the lukewarm believer knows that!

32 .

But God, in His great goodness desires to do His work on earth through men.

“The highest heaven belongs to YAHWEH, but He has given earth to the descendants of Adam.” (Psalm 115:16)

Jesus became a man to redeem us. He did what we could not do to get back the authority Adam gave away. Now, He wants us to believe in Him to do His work on earth through us!

John 14:23 “Those who love Me, will do what I say.”

John 14:26 “The Holy Spirit will teach you EVERYTHING,”

John 15:3 “You are already clean because of what I told you. Live In ME, and I WILL LIVE IN YOU.” You cannot produce fruit unless YOU LIVE IN ME.”

John 15:17 “Love each other. This is what I am commanding you to do.”

John 16:13 “When the Spirit of Truth comes, He will guide you into the full truth.”

John 16:23 “If you ask the Father for anything in my name, he will give it to you.”

John 17:23 “I am in them, and You are in Me...You have loved them IN THE SAME WAY YOU LOVED ME!”

John 14:12-14 “Those who believe in Me will do the things that I am doing. They will do even greater things because I AM going to the Father. I will do anything you ask the Father in My name so that the Father will be given glory, because of the Son. If you ask me to do something I WILL DO IT.”

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These are mighty words and glorious promises. None of it is to exalt us or focus on us. It is as we abide His love flows in and through us and motivates us to see what He sees and do what He does.

Lord, bring us into an experience of this in our daily lives. Not pressed labor, not self-work, but God using the people He has made and bought back. Take us out of our comfort zones and into a life that counts for Jesus' sake.

Day 16

Song of Songs 3:1-4

"On my bed night after night I sought him whom my soul loves; I sought him but did not find him.

'I must arise now and go about the city; in the streets and in the squares I must seek him whom my soul loves.' I sought him but did not find him.

"The watchmen who make the rounds in the city found me, And I said, 'Have you seen him whom my soul loves?'"

"Scarcely had I left them when I found him whom my soul loves; I held on to him and would not let him go, until I had brought him to my mother's house, And into the room of her who conceived me."

At the end of the second chapter the Bride applauds her King and basically says, "You go God," as she rolls over on her bed and reaches out for more raisins. We can have such confidence in God that we fail to see His plan is to work through us. We must go; we carry His Presence.

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It is never easy to leave our comfort zone, the job we are loved and appreciated at or the family and culture we call home. Who knows what could happen if we were to obey and follow Him to the four corners of the earth?

There are many who have died as a result of following. There are some whose children became ill or died. There are some who were totally unnoticed, even though they gave their entire life to staying on the field. Loss, in the eyes of the world: gain, in the eyes of faith. To stay back in the comfort zone means to live your whole life in a spiritual bed. How unfortunate. What a waste. For a Christian to never obey the call to go and share their faith is like a person living by the sea and never learning to swim. Can you imagine? So much refreshment, adventure, and fun and the fearful ones just sit on the edge of the sea building sand castles that will be washed away with the tide. But the worst part of all for this Bride in the Song of Songs is that the peace and joy, the manifest presence of God withdraws.

She tosses on that bed of fear, missing the intimacy of the One she loves. She looked. Perhaps she read her Bible, but it was like dry cornflakes. There would be no new message until she obeyed the last one she heard. So, she does get up. Going to the mountains after Him seems way too frightful; so, she goes to the city. "Have you seen the One I love?" she asks the leaders of the church (the watchmen). But it isn't until she leaves them that she finds the One she loves.

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This time she will not let Him go. She is determined to follow despite all her fears, despite the words of those around her.

You will do anything in terms of serving the King if you are in love. You will find plenty of people there to discourage you, even well meaning believers who have settled for a lukewarm faith. When I understood the Lord wanted me to go to Turkey, it ignited opposition from believer and non-believer alike. But once you have heard His voice no one can come close to providing the thrill of walking with God. To obey Him is to agree to walk with Him. This means growing in our faith, in our knowledge of His love. It requires letting Him be LORD of our finances, LORD of our family, LORD of our home, LORD of our days, and that includes all holidays. The more He has the more we are blessed with His closeness and friendship. The world would love to creep in, but there is nothing like the refreshing waters of His Spirit filling us, cleansing us, lifting us ever higher, ever closer.

Day 17

Song of Songs 3:5

“I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, by the gazelles or by the hinds of the field, that you will not arouse or awaken my love, until she pleases.”

Daughters of Jerusalem are like the choir in this song. Are they the lukewarm pew warmers in the church that faithfully come and watch? Are they the descendants of Abraham who haven't a clue how wonderful the King is and therefore remain present but

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Here the King turns to them and warns them not to disturb the Bride until she is ready to follow.

God is patient and people are not. Sometimes, in our endeavor to do a good job, we rope people into service in the church before they are ready. There needs to be a time where the new believer just soaks up the loving kindness of the LORD. IT is enough for them to come and let His goodness wash over their weary souls and revive them. This amount of time is different for each one and requires patience on the part of the church leaders and deacons who feel overworked and long for someone to help with the load. But God waits. It is the wise leader that discerns when to hand someone a towel and encourage them to get about the work. This honeymoon time is not only precious to the believer, it is precious to the KING and He has some strong opinions about it. "I adjure you". With these words, almost a legal tone commanding hands off for the time being, He puts a hedge around her. Perhaps He knows her fearful heart is not ready to serve with reckless abandonment. She needs time to grow in her understanding of what a trustworthy God He is.

Our times alone with God are as precious to Him as to us. This astounds me. He actually likes to be around me! He knows what I need to set my heart at peace and enable me to trust Him fully. I am not just another slave, not a worker that is to be used. No, I am His and He is mine. Everything flows from this core and God is patient as that core is established. It is as if He is aware of the way others will pressure her to get up and do something, anything!

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But He wants her to follow, to know Him and His voice first and he is warning those in authority or positions of influence to leave her alone for a while. He has some work to do in her heart to bring about that trust and faith to the level that nothing will stop her. Are you enjoying your times alone with this KING? Are you aware of His tenderness and His loving kindness towards you? Give Him some time today to warm your heart and expel your fears.

Day 18

Song of Songs 3:6-8

“What is this coming up from the wilderness, like clouds of smoke? (Luke 21:27 says “And then they will see the SON OF MAN COMING IN A CLOUD with power and great glory.)

That is perfumed with myrrh and incense, made from the merchants’ scented powders. Look! Solomon’s sedan chair! Sixty soldiers from the army of Israel surround it. All of them are skilled in using swords, experienced in combat. Each one has a sword at his side and guards against the terrors of the night.” Our God King is mysterious to us. It requires a lifetime of finding out who He is: growing in knowing.

Our King is glorious, for sure. The bride did not follow Him immediately. There were too many questions not resolved. What are some of the fears that keep us from following?

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<u>Focus Source</u>	<u>Problem/Fear</u>
Self	Of course He's worthy, but I am not.
Doubt	I am inadequate How could He be interested in me? I've failed so many times before.
Evil	There are animals out there.
Distrust	Who knows what I would have to Stand against? How can I fight what I cannot see?
Others	People won't listen to me. Why should they? Unbelief.
God	He is able
Hope	He is willing
Love	He is watching over me
Faith	

The bride sees her King coming full of incense (remember God is Holy and myrrh always points to the fact that He planned to die for us. He rose. He defeated death! What is left to worry about?

Also, notice the ones who surround him. These are not paid foreign soldiers, but Israel's own. They are skilled warriors and there are twice the number that surround the normal king of the day. Perhaps this is a reminder that twice as many angels remained with God as fell with Satan.

So, let's get started doing whatever it is He has sent us and called us to do. Love the next person He brings into your path and tell them about Jesus. Get started!

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Day 19

Song of Songs 3:9-11

“King Solomon had a carriage made for himself from the wood of Lebanon. He had its posts made out of silver, its top out of gold, its seat out of purple fabric, its inside with inlaid scenes of love made for the young women of Jerusalem. Young women of Zion, come out and look at King Solomon! Look at his crown, the crown his mother placed on him on his wedding day his day of joyful delight.”

King Jesus had a cross, made for Himself. He came to die for His bride. The nails, I'm sure, were not made from silver, but He was sold for 30 silver coins.

(Matthew 26:15; 27:5) Though He was royalty, the purple robe put on him was to mock him. (John 19:1-3) Inside His heart was nothing but love. (John 15:13)

For His church, He gave Himself. His great joy will be when the church crowns Him with a pure love, equal to the love He has for her. The wedding day of the Lamb will be the greatest day of joy for Jesus. We will lay down our crowns at His feet and hail Him as our Beloved King. He will receive adoration He is due from those who laid their lives down for Him.

Lord, don't let me wallow in worry, doubt, and distrust today. Enable me by your grace to lay down my life and live a life worthy of my calling today.

Day 20

Song of Songs 4:1-2

The King, the “Ravished Bridegroom God” (as Mike Bickle refers to him) speaks His words of life and love to the bride, who, though immature, is sincere and starting to follow Him. He knows she is only in the city, when He’s called her to the mountains, but He sees a sincere heart and His words will draw her deeper into obedience and trust.

“Look at you! You are beautiful, my true love. Look at you! You are so beautiful. Your eyes behind your veil are like doves. Your hair is like a flock of goats moving down Mt. Gilead. Your teeth are like a flock of sheep come up from the washing. All of them bear twins and NOT ONE has lost its young.”

God looks at the new believer, immature, fearful, yet following, and this is what He sees: “Beautiful, my true love, so beautiful.” Do you see yourself this way? God does, because we are His handiwork and He always finishes what He starts. (Phil 1:6) He sees eyes fixed on Him, so focused that nothing in the world or circumstances can distract them or cause them to move their eyes from Him. He is their safe place. His eyes are full of love. He is a safe place to run to when we are confused, wounded, or a complete failure. He specializes in failures. He loves to enter in and bring transformation. Just focus on Him and let Him do His work. I Thess. 2:13; 5:16-18 This is why Christians are joyful. We have given up the reins of control, strife, and self-promotion. We are confident that His will is good.

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He sees hair, long and uncut, an indication of dedication. Just like Samson, our strength is dependent on being separate from the world. The degree to which we are circumcised in heart and set apart for Him is the degree of our spiritual authority.

This is our inner circumcision. We are “in the world, but not of the world.” That means we are NOT addicted to the inferior things of the world that attract others. We may live in a lovely home, but we could lose it and never lose our peace. We may like beautiful things, but when the King has need of it we give it away with no sense of loss or remorse. We enjoy things, but they don’t have our heart. We are an oddity. Things get stolen and peace reigns. Position gets taken and our heart remains calm.

Deep down we know a very valuable truth: it is not about us. Rejection comes, but it doesn’t touch our core, for we are chosen before the foundation of the earth. (Ephesians 1:4,5,11) We are totally forgiven. (Hebrews 8:8-12) His blood sacrifice is enough. We are perfect and without blemish. (Colossians 1:21-22 and Psalm 138:8) We are complete in Christ. (I Corinthians 1:28-31)

He speaks of her teeth, each one with its mate. I’ve grown old and lost several teeth, so I am especially interested in this one! Babies don’t have teeth. They are nourished by their mother’s milk, but no mother on earth wants to nurse her child for his/her lifetime! No, we long to give them solid food. I loved cooking for my family. It was never wearisome.

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God has many good things for us to eat, but it requires us to read His Word for ourselves. We cannot live on other people's books and sermons. The lasting food, the nourishing meat comes when we are alone with Him. Then we learn the Creator of mouths speaks. The designer of ears listens and hears our praise. He leans down and sees our hearts and he wants us to hear His voice. (John 10:10) He longs for us to speak His words out over our world. He is thrilled when we lean into Him far enough to know what is in His heart.

When that happens, the meat of His Word will be digestible to us and we will be strengthened. We will know Him and be changed into an adult "rightly dividing the Word of truth."

Some use the Word to wound others and Proverbs 26:9 comes to life. God's Word is meant to heal, to bring LIFE, and refresh. It is alive and powerful. Let's eat it. Let's know it. Let's use it.

Day 21

Song of Songs 4:3-5

"Your lips are like a scarlet thread. Your mouth is lovely. Your temples behind your veil are like slices of pomegranate. Your neck is like David's tower. A thousand shields belonging to soldiers are hung on it. Your breasts are like two fawns, like twin gazelles, grazing among the lilies."

In the beginning of this book she asks Him to kiss her with the kisses of His mouth. She has asked the LORD for intimacy. Intimacy with God is what He desires too.

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He is holy and He will bring insight, correction, and a whole new paradigm to the bride's life.

She will no longer be motivated to live for herself. She will be lovesick for Him alone and a stranger in the world she used to be a citizen of. Her heart will not be able to be open to the LORD and the world. She has made her choice. Nothing in her life will be closed to the LORD. All of her heart will need to be closed to the world. This is what intimacy with the living God will result in.

Her lips will be like a scarlet thread: sanctified speech. Major Ian Thomas spoke of vacating and letting Christ takeover. "You vacate and Christ takes over. Pretty soon your life is a permanent vacation," he said. This is what we are called to. Personal opinions and wants set aside, our focus is on the King and He must have His way. So, we no longer say whatever comes to our mind, only what He wants to say: words that encourage, faith words that bring life and hope. Isaiah 50:4 lived out each day.

Remember this is not where the bride is yet, but where He is taking her.

Her neck refers to the will. Her focus is on her King's heart and she has decided to do whatever is on His heart. This is where intimacy is required. We do not know the Father's will without spending time with Him. He loves. Everything He does is out of His love for people. Jesus was moved by the Father's compassion, not by the need of the people. He was never motivated by guilt, shame, or selfish ambition,

but by the love of His Father and He is calling His bride, His church, His individual believers to do the same. Any other goal will fail.

Our will must be set like David's tower. The Hebrew word for will is dynamos, like dynamite. It is power and strength to obey His counsel. This will be the believer in maturity. This will be the end times church.

The reference that is made to her breasts is to one who can nurture others. The mature believer will be one who feeds others the milk of the Word. They are able to love the young, selfish, and sometimes foolish ones. They do not get envious and jealous of the mature ones either. (insight from Mike Bickles) They know how to love and honor all.

They will have a double portion. They have enough for themselves and more to share. They are found in the congregation of God's people, giving to others young and old alike. After Job was tested and refined, he had love for his weaker brothers who had pierced his heart with their words. He prayed for them. He forgave them. After all that he endured, he received a double portion. (Job 42:10)

Lord, bring me to the place where my heart is so expanded that love flows to the one who has, by their bad counsel, pierced me the most. Fix my eyes so intently on your heart that forgiveness flows in sincerity and my double portion rises up to bless others. Give me a heart like Yours. Grant me a mouth, lips, a neck and breasts like this end times bride.

Thank You, that You have already done this in giving

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me Jesus. He is my double portion!

So, I let go of all that was mine, all that I thought was mine. I give up all selfish ambition, all personal goals and desires for my life in exchange for "Jesus Christ in 'me', the hope of glory." (Col 1:27)

Day 22

Song of Songs 4:6

"When day brings a cool breeze and the shadows flee, I will go to the mountain of myrrh and the hill of incense."

Lord, I'm in this to the end. I plan to go all the way. Jesus went all the way to the cross. He was victorious because while on the cross only love came out of His heart. Listen to His words while He hung in excruciating pain and brokenness:

"Yeshua saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing there. He said to his mother, 'Look, here's your son!' Then He said to the disciple, 'Look, here's your mother!'" John 19:26

In all that pain there was no self-focus. I am moved again as I type this that the most intimate relationship we can enjoy is between mother and child. It is ours by birth. Yet even this He gave to someone else. What a costly gift.

After they had crucified Him His first recorded words were: "Father, forgive them. They don't know what they're doing." Luke 23:34

While He hung on the cross, pouring Himself out for us in obedience to the Father, two thieves (stealing being

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a definite choice of selfishness) argued. One has one thought that reveals a glimmer of faith “this man hasn’t done anything wrong. Yeshua, remember me when you enter Your Kingdom.” (Luke 23:43) These are faith words, simply stated. I know you are who you say you are. I don’t understand why you are on a cross like me, but I want to be where You are going.

Yeshua responded, “I can guarantee this truth: today you will be with me in paradise!”

Even while on the cross Jesus was focused on what the Father wanted Him to be focused on. Jesus had refused to drink wine mixed with a drug to numb the pain. He felt it all.

For 3 hours darkness came upon the land. Was this when the weight, shame, guilt, and filth of the world came upon the Light of the world? It was at that point He cried: “ELI, ELI, LAMA SABACHTHANI?” “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” Yeshua loudly cried out, and gave up His life. I don’t think it was a cry of pain or it would have written this while the nails were driven in His hands. No, I think it was a war cry against the darkness. It was the cry of victory over the enemy. For after the cry, the curtain in the Temple split in two from the top down, the earth shook, rocks were split open, tombs opened, and the dead rose up and went to the Holy City.

In summary, on the cross He still saw what the Father saw. He chose to taste it all and He was a perfect offering. In the midst of it He rescued out someone and provided for His family. He succeeded and tasted

separation from the Father for us. As a result, the way to connect with God was opened. The way home was paved.

There were those who got it: the Roman soldier standing there in midst of all that blood and human suffering, the thief who'd spent his life on himself. They noticed who Jesus was and it changed who they were for all eternity. I wonder what job the soldier found as a career after that day.

The only thing that matters in my life now is Jesus. As He gave up all rights to the Father, let me live this day laying down all rights to Him. Let Him live His life in me today. Let this body be His vehicle.. Let me see what He sees. Let me say what He says. Let me do what He does.

Jesus went to the mountain of myrrh. Can I do the same today? It will mean life to others.

Day 23

Song of Songs 4:7

“You are beautiful IN EVERY WAY, my true love. There is NO BLEMISH on you.” (capitals are mine for emphasis)

We would think these are the words of the bride to the Groom, but indeed they are His words to us. To believe God's Word is our greatest work! (John 6:29) Yeshua answered and said unto them, “This is the work of God: that you believe on Him whom He hath sent.” It takes God to believe on Jesus. Our faith is even His work.

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What is He taking us to: rest, peaceful confidence, complete assurance that I am in Him and He is in me. Psalm 138:8 "Yahweh will perfect that which concerns me." Only those with this kind of confidence can walk up to strangers and pray for their healing, share the Gospel with them, hand them a tract, or in the very least, invite them to church. And only the church who believes in these words is the place you would want to invite someone to.

Col 1:21-22 "Once you were hostile to God. The evil things you did showed your hostile attitude. But now Christ has brought you back to God by dying in his physical body. He did this so that you could come into God's presence without sin, fault, or blame. "

When we grasp our value based on what a great sacrifice God made for us, when we comprehend the implications, the doors that are opened to us because of His sacrifice, when we embrace this truth that He loves us and gave Himself in our place so that we are free, we will begin to live the Life, His life in us and we will watch God do what only He can do. This is the transformation of the human soul.

Father in heaven, how my heart longs, aches, to see others set free and transformed. How I long for today to count for eternity. Take me into your Presence, impress on my heart the depth of these truths and lead me in the path of life. Let it be about You today. Let your Kingdom come with in and around me wherever I go. Lead, guide, and direct my steps today. It the words of Major Ian Thomas this life of love and purity is something "I can't do, you never said I could. You can. You always said You would." Amen

Day 24

Song of Songs 4:8

“You will come with me...as my bride. You will travel with me... from the mountain peaks...from the lairs of lions, from the mountains of leopards.”

To be born again means the Spirit of God lives within you. All that God had planned in salvation gets to be part of your daily life. This is perhaps the most important verse in the book to me. We have been called out of the darkness, not to wallow in raisins and apples, (although that’s lovely from time to time), but to be His warrior bride, to partner with Him in His vineyard. It is at this verse that the Groom calls her once again to the call he made in 2:10. He has not changed His mind. He has simply waited for her to show the slightest sign of obedience. And she has showed in chapter 3 that she couldn’t stand life without His Presence. She got up and went to the city to find Him. Here He is calling her again to the mountain.

And what will she find in the mountain? Lions and leopards await her! She will find opposition of a strength she never anticipated. The enemy doesn’t play fair. He will go after your children, your health, and your marriage relationship. I have served 3 decades in a foreign land and I have tasted the battle. Discouragement, despair, depression, and destiny malaise are some of his slyest weapons. He will use your friends, just as He got to use Judas, because He knows that hurts the most.

But take heart. He is a trustworthy Savior. He says, "Travel with me." This means through each trial your eyes stay focused on Him. Satan will accuse you and you will be tempted to agree with Him. Don't! You are a child of God without blemish. It's not about what you have done. It is about what He has accomplished on the cross. Proclaim it! I am His and He is mine! I am without blemish.

I remember the day this dawned on my heart. This truth needs to be the very essence of you. We had just received a 6 point letter of our major failings and weaknesses. It had been composed by our mission leaders, read to our team, read to the Turkish leadership in the city, and then read to us. I wanted to cry, but the LORD would not allow it. He kept a steady stream of guests throughout that day. Finally, at the kitchen sink I said, "Lord, I just want to be alone and cry."

"Why?"

"Because of the criticism letter that said things that weren't true about us!"

"Would you rather they stated your real sin areas?" The truth was being exposed: I have no reputation to defend.

"No, those faults are fine."

Sobered but not happy I continued serving my way through the day. My last guest was a Turkish believer that many suspected of living an immoral life. She came in while the house was full of others.

Following Turkish etiquette the other visitors left at that point. She immediately said, "Devri, what is going on? I was on my way home from work, totally exhausted after teaching art to children all day, and the LORD told me to come to your house because someone needed prayer."

I told her briefly of leaving our team, of their letter that we'd received that day. Then we prayed. My friend saw hundreds of snakes spinning near my head.

"Am I that bad?" I asked wearily.

"No, they are not in you, they are waiting to attack." She also saw a black cat with a bow and arrow pointed at me. Then the most amazing thing happened. She counseled me with great wisdom! She said, "You know what you are going to do? You are going to sit back, rest, and watch the LORD defend you."

Something within me knew these words were Wisdom speaking. How fascinating that God would use the one believers thought ill of to counsel me. My response was not nearly as deep.

"That is nice, but I need a verse, but I am too tired to even read the Word tonight. I need a verse in the morning LORD, because, if You are trying to correct me, I am totally blind to these areas."

I slept like a baby. In the morning I picked up my Amy Carmichael devotional and read: "The Levites comforted the people saying: 'Do not be grieved. This is the Lord's Day.'" Nehemiah 8:11 The devotional went on to say that if God commands it we can obey. We need to shut the doors and windows of our life to this negative emotion and praise the LORD.

There are two reasons this verse pierced my heart. The first reason was that the word “grief” jumped off the page and gave verbal confirmation of what I was feeling. I was feeling grief of separation and grief to the death of self. Secondly, Dan heard these words as I read them and said, “Ok, let’s obey.” He picked up his guitar and we began to sing a praise song. The peace and joy that flooded my heart were amazing.

It was indeed Sunday, the “Lord’s Day,” so we prepared to drive across town to worship with others, most of whom had heard the criticism letter read out loud. We sat in the parking lot and Dan asked me to repeat the verse that I had memorized . To this day it is etched on my heart. We wrapped it around ourselves like a blanket and went inside with the most sincere joy and peace I can remember. I was experiencing Psalm 23:5 “You prepare a banquet for me while my enemies watch. You anoint my head with oil. My cup overflows.” Let me say here that I am not being self-righteous. This was His righteousness given to me.

What I understood that day was who we are in Christ. God is not fault finding. When we see a brother in sin, instead of joining with the Accuser of the brethren (a fault I have been guilty of myself) we need to remind them who they are in Christ. What I learned that day was JESUS hadn’t changed one bit from the first day I had experienced His grace in my life. He was the same. He was still full of grace. You may be thinking I exaggerated Nehemiah 8:11, that it was just a coincidence that I read that verse on a Sunday. To that I must tell you the rest of the story.

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At the end of the service the worship leader did an unusual thing. Never before or after did I see a worship leader add a verse to the end of the service, but this Korean man looked directly at Dan and I and quoted Nehemiah 8:11. "And the Levites calmed the people saying, 'Do not be grieved. This is the LORD's Day.'" I could hardly breathe.

"Dan, was I imagining it or was he looking directly at us?"

"He was looking at us."

"Was I imagining it or did he just read Neh. 8:11?"

"He did."

This man had no knowledge of the letter. Three years later I would tell him how his words affected us and he bowed low before the LORD in response, moved that God used him without his understanding it.

So, today when the Accuser attacks remember who you are in Christ and do NOT be grieved. God does train us, but He never shames us or belittles us. We are the children of God and His love endures forever.

Day 25

Song of Songs 4:9-10

"My Bride, my sister, you have charmed me.

"You have charmed me, with a single glance from your eyes, with a single strand of your necklace.

"How beautiful are your expressions of love, my bride, my sister."

"How much better are your expressions of love than wine and the fragrance of your perfume than any spice."

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What do you give the person who has everything?
What can we give to the Creator of the Universe? Do
you want to make His heart smile and make His heart
beat fast with joy?

Look at Him.

Sit with Him a while.

Sing a song, a new song.

Obey His gentle whisper.

Tell Him out loud what you love about Him.

In the beginning of this book the Bride declared the King's expressions of love to be better than wine. She longed for intimacy with her King. His beauty, His love, and His words of love were better than anything the world had to offer. Now something has changed. Her King has turned to look at the one following Him and He says the same words back to her. She has obeyed and is following Him to the mountain of lions and leopards and it brings Him great pleasure to see her obedience. God loves it when His children trust Him enough to obey. He will lead us into a life that counts.

He will pour His love out on His planet through us. We have lost the expressions of love. It is what the enemy steals first. Let's give it back to the glorious King: the praises of His people. Let's focus our gaze on Him who is true.

He likes it! He calls us His Bride. We are partnered with Him and He will come back and get us to live with Him forever.

He calls us His "sister". We have become His family. We are related to the King. We have charmed Him by looking at Him, by listening to Him, by obeying Him.

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Each link in the necklace represents an act of obedience. And we smell like the best spice to Him, a fragrance of offering on the altar. (Romans 12:1-2) We are a living sacrifice.

Let's just be that today! I Chronicles 9 is about the jobs given to the Levites and priests. Some were trusted with the treasury because of their faithfulness. Some were gatekeepers of the Temple because of their diligence. Some were watchmen at the entrance to the tent because they were trustworthy. Some spent the whole night at their job. Some were in charge of the utensils for worship. Some mixed spices and some played music.

God has noted everyone who serves in His Temple. No act of service goes without His notice. Let's serve Him today.

Day 26

Song of Songs 4:11

“Your lips drip honey, my bride. Honey and milk are under your tongue. The fragrance of your clothing is like the fragrance of Lebanon.”

The tongue is something we could study every month to remind us of the seriousness of what comes out of our mouth! Here are just a few verses:
Numbers 14: Of 12 spies 10 gave a negative report. Israelites complaining and speaking words of unbelief and distrust result in NOT ENTERING THE LAND. For forty years they would wander in the wilderness.
Philippians 2:14-15 and 4:6-8: “Do EVERYTHING

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without complaining or arguing. Then you will be blameless and innocent.

“Never worry about ANYTHING but in EVERY SITUATION let God know what you need in prayers and requests WHILE GIVING THANKS...then the peace will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.”

Isaiah 50:4 “Adonai Yahweh will teach me what to say, so I will know how to encourage weak people.

Morning after morning he will wake me to listen like a student.” And in case you are afraid you will miss His voice keep reading: Isaiah 50:5 “Adonay Yahweh will open my ears.”

Wisdom tells us:

Proverbs 8:13, 17: “To fear Yahweh is to hate evil. I hate pride, arrogance, evil behavior, AND TWISTED SPEECH. Advice and priceless wisdom are mine. I love those who love me. Those eagerly looking for me WILL FIND ME.” (Capital letters mine for emphasis.)

Proverbs 10:11 “The mouth of a righteous person is a fountain of life.

10:13 “Wisdom is found on the lips of a person who has understanding.

10:19 “Sin is not absent where there is much talk, but he who seals his lips is wise.

10:32 “The lips of a righteous person announce good will.”

12:6 “The words of wicked people are a deadly ambush, but the words of decent people rescue.”

12:22 “Lips that lie are disgusting to Yahweh, but honest people are His delight.”

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15:1 "A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger."

15:4 "A soothing tongue is a tree of life, but a deceitful tongue breaks the spirit."

15:7 "The lips of wise people spread knowledge."

18:4 "The words of a person's mouth are like deep waters. The fountain of wisdom is an overflowing stream."

18:21 "The tongue has the power to life and death, and those who love to talk will have to eat their own words."

25:11 "Like golden apples in silver settings so is a word spoken at the right time."

Of course, there are many more examples from a negative or warning perspective. But here are the verses that indicate the heart of God. His words bring life and ours should too. When this part of us is in alignment with the Son, we are mature. (James 3:1-12)

Come, Lord Jesus, and be glorified today in my speech. Jesus came to restore us to our position with the Father living His life in me. There is something extremely valuable about a human being, a vessel of the living God. Valuable enough for God to think sending His Son was worth it. The enemy goes after this identity and tries to breathe in the orphan spirit.

But we believe God's words, that we are loved. We are beautiful to Him and all our purpose flows out of pleasing the Father. He is love, therefore whatever He tells us to do will be motivated by and consistent with this.

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Day 27

Song of Songs 4:12-15

“My bride, my sister is a garden that is locked,
a garden that is locked,
a spring that is sealed.

You are paradise that produces pomegranates and the
best fruits,
henna flowers and nard,
nard and saffron, calamus, cinnamon, and all kinds of
incense, myrrh,
aloes and all the best spices.

You are a spring for gardens, a well of living water
flowing from Lebanon.”

The Groom sees the bride (whether this is the end times church or the individual believer who is desperate for Him) as a garden that is locked. In those days it meant that the owner of the garden had a locked, walled in, protected garden. Roaming animals could not get in and trample the plants or muddy the waters.

In my childhood we lived in a house that bordered a farm and wooded area. From time to time the cows would find their way through the woods and into our yard where they'd eat the flowers and grass in our yard. It was not a locked garden! Cows are gentle creatures, but their weight, hooves, and droppings left a big mess!

So it is with the world. God's garden needs to be shut off from the world. This doesn't mean we live like monks. It means our heart is sealed off to the things of

the world. We know the evil behind the glitter and so are not deceived.

Our heart, our garden is locked to the strife, hatred, lust, and pulse of the world and its ways. The bride is quiet, gentle, and full of good smelling spices. The aloes refer to healing plants. The spices are fragrant and pleasing to God. All the fruit of the Spirit is found in the Groom's garden. His bride brings Him great joy. He calls her a paradise.

Pomegranates were carved into the temple, 400 of them! (I Kings 7:20, 41) They were full of seeds, and full of sweetness. From the garden, the heart of the believer, arises prayers and incense to the LORD. He says to His bride that she is a spring for other gardens. In the beginning, God planned for every plant to bear seeds that would result in plants of the same kind. So, we reproduce what we are. Look around you. God is reproducing your heart in the person you are witnessing to, nurturing, and discipling. It's all His design and comes out of your locked garden heart.

He has put within us a "well of living water." It will give rise to all kinds of wonderful gardens. You can count on it, because it is His plan.

Father, thank you, for your great wisdom. Thank you for locking the garden of my heart to the ways of the world. Thank you for this living water that You have given me in Jesus. Let it flow out today to those I live with, to those in the stores I go to, to my neighbors', friends, and family.

Day 28

Song of Songs 4:16

“Awake, north wind! Come, south wind! Blow on my garden! Let its spices flow from it. Let my Beloved come to His garden and let Him eat His own precious fruit.”

The Groom King has finished speaking. There was not one negative word in His heartfelt talk. We see the heart of our King speaking encouragement, strengthening His bride. It is so easy to discern God’s voice from others. His always causes us to rise up and be what He deserves us to be. Sometimes He corrects us, but even then His words bring freedom from the enemy of our souls.

Here is the bride after hearing all these wonderful expressions of His love. She is so strengthened she says, “Bring it on world! Throw at me the harsh north wind or throw at me the gentle goodness of the south wind. It doesn’t matter if my circumstances are good or bad as long as the wind blows across my garden so that my King can enjoy the fragrance of His garden. All I am, all I have belongs to Him. The fruit in me is the result of His work in me. It all belongs to Him.”

What a change in the bride. She is no longer fearful as she was in chapter two. She is no longer full of shame and suffering from exposure, self-pity and weariness as she was in chapter one. Her doves eyes have accomplished what God had in mind for her. I borrowed a book from the library of North Cyprus International Church Fellowship. It was a biography of Watchman Nee, which was written by some historian.

Although the book itself was pretty dry reading, I am glad I took it out, for the one sentence on the first blank page of the book. This sentence and the signature was not from the author, but from Watchman Nee himself. With his signature he wrote these words:

“I want nothing for myself, and everything for Jesus.”

This is the bride the King deserves. May He receive a heart like this from me today.

Day 29

Song of Songs 5:1

“My bride, my sister, I will come to My garden. I will gather my myrrh with my spice. I will eat my honey comb. I will drink my wine with my milk... Eat my friends! Drink and become intoxicated with expressions of love.”

The Groom hears our heartfelt responses to His love. He hears the bride say, “Come north wind!” and He is about to test her. Times of testing and times of trials are like north winds: cold and biting. It is in these times of trouble that our true character shows forth.

Abraham waited 25 years for his son to be born. There had to be no shadow of a doubt that this was the promised son.

David waited for years fleeing the wrath of Saul well after he had been anointed King.

Israel waited hundreds of years for their Messiah, so long that most did not recognize Him.

The believers that followed Jesus waited in Jerusalem for a “gift” they didn’t understand or have the slightest idea what it was.

We obey while we follow.

We hope while we wait.

We trust while we go through trials.

Our King will indeed come to His garden. It is all about Him and for Him.

Col 1:16 He created all things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible. Whether they are kings or lords, rulers or powers, everything has been created through Him and for Him.

Father in heaven, King Jesus, precious Holy Spirit, let my life today bring you great pleasure. Touch my mind to see your pre-eminence. Fill my heart to willingly bow the knee and grant me true humility that I will become the bride you deserve.

Day 30

Song of Songs 5:1

“I will gather my myrrh with my spice. I will eat my honeycomb with my honey. I will drink my wine with my milk. Eat my friends. Drink and become intoxicated with expressions of love!”

I just want to gaze on these strange words, to bring light to their meaning, to be trained by their intent, because the next part of this chapter hang on this verse.

Myrrh is used for burial ceremonies. You wouldn't mix it in tea for flavor, or put it in your casserole for zest. No, it is only used for burial. A spice used in the embalming of a dead body. Yet, Jesus gathers myrrh with His spices. His heart is totally surrendered to the Father's will, so on a day when He heals 100, feeds

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5,000 or raises a dead man His heart is full of as much love as the day He hangs on a cross. His strength? How can He accept the myrrh with the spice? He trusts the Father. He wants us to trust Him too.

Have you ever eaten honeycomb? To me it is a little waxy. I've watched my Turkish friends eat it and enjoy it, but I always wonder why they do it. Personally, I like my honey separate from the honeycomb, preferably in a bottle that tips up and spills nothing. I am, after all, an American. But, the King eats them together. He accepts us with all our flaws and loves us the same. He patiently trains and disciplines us, weaning us away from lies, bad habits, and worry. He can handle the sweet with the not so pleasant, because He is able to bring good out of every situation. He is that good!

Who would not want to hear His voice? Who would not want to be nourished, intoxicated, strengthened, and directed by Him?

I fear we have lost this art of speaking expressions of love to each other. The rare couple enjoy it to a degree, but an even rarer group know how to speak with God with expressions of love that intoxicate His heart. Lord, in Your Presence I'm ashamed of my harsh, rough edges. I'm longing to be intoxicated, corrected, and loved by Your words. I'm longing to encourage and strengthen others. You are the Source. You alone combine truth and love. Fill me with this strange combination today. Let Your words flow. Let Your attitude come upon me. Let confidence in your ability

to bring good out of every situation rule my heart today. Enable me to accept imperfection in my friends and in myself.

Day 31

Song of Songs 5:2

“I sleep, but my mind is awake. Listen! My beloved is knocking.”

From now on the bride is tuned into her groom. She has eyes for Him alone and she loves His Presence. This is an alert mind. God does not prattle on. He speaks so gently, so quietly, so succinctly. When He speaks people are set free, people are healed. Diseases, demons, lies, and darkness flee. But who is listening? We need to be ready to listen when He speaks. Here she is lying in her bed at night, but her heart is ever ready to hear His voice. Some things He will speak to her through dreams. But here He bids her to rise up off her bed.

My most intimate times have come in the quiet of the night while others sleep. For a year and a half I rose at 4:30 to go to church and pray from 5-7 once a week. Many times I heard nothing, but once, when the room was full of Koreans and the worship was led by a Korean man, who was on a 40 day fast, I heard the LORD. He spoke through my voice and said, “Come higher, where the air is fresh, and breathe in Life.” It was at a time of great trial for us in the church. Leadership was divided. Division and demonic attack was all around us. There wasn’t a day that I felt quiet and peaceful.

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The LORD, the Commander of Hosts spoke to me that day. His words gave direction and comfort. Don't try to figure it all out. Don't try to judge every action and weigh every word. God is not like that. "Come up higher and sit with Him and listen. His ways are not our ways. Let the grace of His Presence rule your heart." It was an oasis in the desert, a stillness that was like the eye of the storm. In the end we had to leave the church to others, and that was not the issue. It is never about us. The issue is will I be able to maintain my faith walk in the day of failure and loss. Will I arrive in heaven with a heart that loves, or will I be crippled up with self-pity, pride, and emptiness?

If I want to have victory I will be desperate enough for His friendship, for He visits any hour of any day. I will plan for times alone, but I will respond to His knocking at inconvenient times. I will trust Him and know His voice when He calls me out of that warm bed and woos me from the peaceful escape of sleep.

"The teachings of Yahweh are perfect. They renew the soul.

The testimony of Yahweh is dependable.. It makes gullible people wise.

The instructions of Yahweh are correct. They make the heart rejoice.

The command of Yahweh is radiant. It makes the eyes shine.

The fear of Yahweh is pure. It endures forever.

The decisions of Yahweh are true. They are completely fair.

They are more desirable than gold, even the finest gold.

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They are sweeter than honey, even the drippings of the honeycomb.

As your servant I am warned by them. There is great reward in following them.

Who can notice every mistake? Forgive my hidden faults. Keep me from sinning. Do not let anyone gain control over me.

Then I will be blameless, and I will be free from any great offense.

May the words of my mouth and the thoughts of my heart be acceptable to You Oh Yahweh, my Rock and my Redeemer. " Ps 19:7-14

Day 32

Song of Songs 5:3-5

"Open to me my true love, my sister, my dove, my perfect one. My head is wet with dew, my hair with the dewdrops of night."

Here the Groom invites her out in the early morning. It is His invitation from 2:10 being repeated since she said in 4:8, 16 that she would go with Him. She invited the winds to blow on her life so the Groom King could enjoy the fragrance from His garden.

He is calling for an open heart to Him, one that trusts Him all day long no matter what is happening. One who knows they are loved and are still confident of His love. This is when we receive bad news. "You are being sent away," "You are inadequate for this job," "You are not needed here." When such words are thrown our way we need to repeat what is true about us. The truth is what God says and He says:

“My dove, my perfect one.” It is His perspective since we’ve been washed with the blood of the Lamb. There is no charge of guilt, no need for shame when one is loved by the Bridegroom King.

The bride is about to be tested again. In chapter 3 she disobeyed and woke to find He had moved on. Just like Jesus walked on the earth. He moved on until He died on the cross, so following Him now is a personal choice. Song of Songs 5:3 “I have taken off my clothes! Why should I put them on again? I have washed my feet! Why should I get them dirty again?”

Here the Bride answers the Groom’s invitation. She is not lazily whining because she doesn’t want to be bothered. She is not fearful of following any longer. She is saying, “Yes! I am no longer wearing the clothes of shame! I am no longer dapping in the things of the world.” She is ready to follow..

Song of Songs 5:4 “My Beloved put his hand through the keyhole. My heart throbbed for Him. “

These two verses are why the beginning of verse 3 is not a lazy protest. She is so ready to give Him her whole heart. She is passionate for her King. No lesser degree of love and relationship will suffice. If I am to follow Jesus it requires (like David, but unlike the half-heart of Solomon who penned the words and then chose 1,000 women and their idols. Unlike Saul, who had no heart for God)

Song of Songs 5:5 “I got up to open for my Beloved. My hands dripped with myrrh, and my fingers were drenched with liquid myrrh on the handles of the lock.”

Again, we see here why verse 3 cannot be a heart of rebellion. She has not only put off self and washed herself, but she has myrrh (death to self) dripping from her hands. She is all His. It is important to understand her wholehearted allegiance here or the rest of the chapter goes without its deep meaning. This is a test of north wind proportions about to blow across her garden of spices. She is ready for the test to come. She is selfless, focused on her Beloved with dove's eyes and dripping with the myrrh of selflessness. She has learned obedience and she is about to be tested. It must be time for me to pause and consider. As we move from Ankara after 27 years to the beauty and quietness of Northern Cyprus, is my heart pure? Everywhere I look, my home, the sea, the clouds, the mountains, the faces of my new friends, I am surrounded by beauty. After so long in war and conflict my heart and mind are puzzled. Am I being tempted by the world after so long in the desert, or have I come to an oasis for a pause in the battle?

The Lord does not want us self-evaluating, introspective, and imagining sin and agreeing with the Accuser. He wants us confident of His love, sure of the ability of the Holy Spirit to convict us when we go off course, and convinced that He is able and willing to "perfect that which concerns us". Psalm 138:8

What about you? Do you have a hard time accepting His good gifts? Do you feel unworthy of the good things He has given you? If so, pray with me.

So, my Beloved, thank You for this quiet place of beauty. Thank you that heaven is going to be so much more than this. Guard my heart from being tied to anything You give us in this season.

Day 33

Song of Songs 5:6-7

"I opened for my Beloved, but my Beloved had turned away. He was gone! I almost died when he left. I looked for Him, but I did not find Him. I called for Him, but He did not answer. The watchmen making their rounds in the city found me. They struck me! They wounded me! Those watchmen on the walls took my robe from me!"

The north wind is blowing! The wonderful mountain top experience with her Beloved has changed. She no longer senses His Presence. We know He is there, because He says He will never leave us or forsake us. (Hebrews 13:5) However, the feeling of His presence is gone.

Remember this is not a consequence of her own sinfulness, but a result of her invitation to the north wind of testing and trial to come, that her Beloved Groom King might enjoy the fragrance of her garden. However, as she lives through this trial she does not remember her words of 4:16. What she does realize is how empty she feels when He is gone. She has grown used to this "friend that sticks closer than a brother." (Proverbs 18:24)

This reminds me of Matthew 27:46 "Eli, Eli, Lama sabachthani." Jesus was pure and without any blemish at all, and He experienced this. He did this for us. What a great purchase of souls He accomplished, but at what great cost. For Jesus alone knows the unstrained continual fellowship of the Holy Spirit. He alone from birth to that moment on the cross knew what that kind of relationship with the Father was like.

Wow! Not expected! Matthew 26:3-4 reveals that this was the chief priests who planned to crucify Jesus. Matthew also records for us that the soldiers took off Jesus' robe and mocked Him with a red cape. Matthew 27:28 and again after they had him crucified on the cross the soldiers gambled for his clothes. (Matthew 27:35)

I share this because though the Bride is experiencing it in Song of Songs, her King would also experience this. The Bride is beaten by her leaders and loses her position in the congregation. I've been reading a book about Watchman Nee, a famous Chinese Christian and author of many helpful books. He too was cast out by the leaders of the temple. When Watchman Nee cried out to Jesus, the LORD did not allow him to wallow in self-pity and self-focus. He said, "Leave your problem with Me. You go and preach the Good News."

In short, these times of great testing will come. Sincere believers are tempted to doubt, worry about hidden faults and sin and be paralyzed into inaction. But God is faithful, who does not let us be tempted beyond that which we are able. We are not living under our own righteousness. No matter what others say to us or about us, we must keep focused on the fact that Jesus has not changed one bit from the day we were saved. Our walk began, continues, and ends by grace.

So, focus on Him, on the finished work of the cross. No matter how you feel or what is being said about you, we must continue until He comes. Be about your Father's business for only the lazy worker will have cause to be ashamed.

After this trial Watchman Nee watched the LORD miraculously deliver a whole village that had been locked in idol worship for centuries. Persevering righteous work is always rewarded.

Day 34

Song of Songs 5:8-9

“Young women of Jerusalem, swear to me that if you find my Beloved you will tell Him I am hopelessly lovesick.”

“Most beautiful of women, what makes your beloved better than any other beloved? What makes your beloved better than any other beloved that you make us swear this way?”

The bride is in the darkest trial of her life. Her Beloved is gone and the leaders of the church have taken away her anointing, her position in the church. Perhaps you think this never happens. Then I ask, what about Joseph, David, Jesus, and Paul? It does happen. There are times of great darkness, I'm sure Job will tell his story when we get to heaven.

But the bride's response shows us how she has changed. She does not take an offense. My husband's Dad gave him a verse when he was yet a young man and it made all the difference to him as he walked through a world turned against God. It was Psalm 119:165 “There is lasting peace for those who love your teachings. Nothing can make those people stumble” In the King James version it says: “Great peace have them that love thy law and nothing shall offend them. “ Our inner peace is not in the hands of those around us. It is not open to enemy attack.

It is our choice to take an offense or walk in forgiveness in inner peace.

We do not hear the bride speaking against the watchmen or complaining against her “absent” Savior. She is not offended. Her eyes are searching for her Beloved. It reminds me of Mary Magdalen going to the grave, for that is the last place she saw them put her Beloved. When she got to the empty tomb her heart panicked. “They have taken my Lord, and I don’t know where they have put him,” she cried out and after she turned and saw someone she presumed to be the gardener. “Sir, if you carried him away tell me where you have put him and I’ll remove him.”

Funny, a corpse with all the extra weight of spices and wrappings and she thinks she is able to carry it. But her heart is willing. She had been delivered of 7 demons (Luke 8:2). Can you imagine her fear when her Master was killed? Would the demons return? She wanted to stay as close to her Deliverer as she could.

So the bride also, in the time of confusion and trial does not change in her commitment to her Beloved. She says, “If you find Him tell Him I am lovesick, hopelessly lovesick.

There is no hope for her if her Beloved is gone. There is no purpose for her life if her connection to Him is cut.

The daughters of Jerusalem cannot understand her great tie to this one she calls her “Beloved”. It is her loyalty and undivided commitment to the Groom in this time of trial that gets their attention the most and their gaze goes from her to her Beloved. Who is he?

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Joni Eareckson Tada was crippled from age 16 on. It was in her wheelchair she discovered the intimacy with Jesus, a Master who suffered for her. Out of her discovery and her closeness to the Groom she has produced inspired Christmas cards (painted with her mouth) and written several devotionals. She travels the world bringing hope and help to other paraplegics. When I read about Joni, Lord, I marvel at how little I have suffered and I ask, "Who is this Beloved that she follows so closely?" It is against the backdrop of suffering the children of Light shine the most. Today, Lord, let all complaining and smallness of heart disappear from my mouth, and let me follow You closely, with dove's eyes. Strengthen my walk so that in times of greatest trial I will not be offended.

Day 35

Song of Songs 5:10-12

"My Beloved is dazzling white, yet ruddy. He stands out among 10,000 men. His head is the finest gold. His hair is wavy, black as a raven. His eyes are set like doves bathing in milk."

Her God is silent. Her leadership is attacking her. Wow, everything has fallen in on her and her God is silent. Yet, she has said, "If you find my Beloved, tell him I am lovesick." She then goes on to answer the question, "What makes your Beloved better than any other?" Some believers use times of trial and desperation as an excuse to sin, to overindulge in food, alcohol, sex, whatever their addiction is. But the bride is not offended. She is not focusing on the watchmen

nor is she angry with God that everything is not going her way. She is lovesick for His Presence and it shows in her answer to the daughters of Jerusalem.

No one could say it has been easy for the Jews to be the people of God. Being in the world has so often moved their heart from God to idols. The World Wars' effect on them left bitterness and disillusionment. Moving to be a focal nation in 1948 made them a target and it has been an uphill journey ever since.

Will the church in the end times be different? Will we be the bride the Lord deserves? When the trials and judgments of Revelation pour down on us and the Anti-Christ attacks, will we be like the bride? Will we be ready to stand firm?

This bride was ready. She is being attacked even though she is a locked garden. She, like Job, is being punished even though the world has no place in her heart. She is not grumbling and complaining. She is pressing into God deeper. She is suffering without complaint, like her Savior, like her King.

She describes Him as “dazzling” and some versions say “white”. To look at Him would be like looking at the sun through a telescope.. not recommended! He is brilliant and nothing in her life comes close to His pre-eminence. He is the focal point of all she does. He is the reason she uses her finances the way she does, the reason she spends her time the way she does, the purpose she is alive and walking around. Those watching her life are shocked and stop watching her to see what she is focused on. “His head is like gold.”

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The Psalmist declares that God's decisions, His Law, His commandments are "more desirable than gold." (Ps 19:10) God is pure, tested, and without impurity. This is her Beloved, Jesus, the head of the church. Because He is the head His body will make it through the end times. Any who obey the head will be as brilliant as He is. They will be in alignment with the Son.

His hair, which always speaks of being dedicated and set apart, is wavy and black as a raven. He is full of the vigor and health of youth. He is totally set apart for the work the Father has for Him. And so His brothers and sisters will be. They will be "in the world but not of the world." (John 17:14-16) They will not be running to their next fix of material things. Their goal will not be a bigger, better, house, car, or toy, because it could never satisfy like He does. He gives purpose, direction, and fulfillment to their days. Their possessions are to be used in His service and the loss of them never touches their heart.

Jesus had no home of his own. He was not esteemed, but came as the servant of all. He died the same kind of death as a thief, in disgrace, but arose a victor over death. All He needed was provided, but he owned nothing. (Luke 9:57-62) He did this to gain a great deal for us. Those convinced of this will follow Him with the same passion. "His eyes are set like doves bathing in milk." There are no weary red lines from sleepless nights. There are not burst blood vessels from stress, overindulging, no yellowness from nicotine and drug abuse. His eyes are set, doing only what the Father wants.

He is fixed on doing what the Father wants, because that is what he knows makes real life flow. Power, authority, and victory flow out of His pure, unadulterated obedience to the Father.

Jesus showed us this life. He opened the door for us to enter into a life that is full, directed and purposeful. Who could want a different "Beloved"? There is none like Him. The bride said this in the midst of her test. Unlike Job she is not offended and it is her song of her Beloved in the midst of her suffering that draws the greatest attention to her King. Get ready church!

Day 36

Song of Songs 5:13-14

"His cheeks are like a garden of spices, a garden that produces scented herbs. His lips are lilies that drip with myrrh."

In the midst of the confusion, attack, and loss in her trial, she remains unconfused about her Beloved. In this description on her Groom-King she discloses the deepest admiration. Each line is loaded with depth of meaning and passion. How interesting that her words about Him seem to echo His words to her in 4:1-5. It reminds me of two lovers saying, "I love you!" "I love you more!"

Remember these words are said on a hard day, adding to the impact the words will have on the daughters of Jerusalem. What an illustration of Hebrews 13:15 "Through Yeshua we should always bring God a sacrifice of praise, that is words that acknowledge Him."

Psalm 50:1 "Bring your thanks to Elohim as a sacrifice."

Cheeks speak of emotion. God has emotion and He is full of fragrance of every wholesome lovely emotion you can imagine. This is why staying near Him by reading His Word with understanding and singing we are refreshed. His emotions of love, joy, peace, and hope produce a whole garden of goodness. "His lips are lilies that drip with myrrh." Out of Jesus' mouth, from His lips in every account He demonstrated Eph 4:29 "Don't say anything that would hurt another person. Instead speak only what is good so that you can give help wherever it is needed. That way what you say will help those who hear you."

Throughout Scriptures Jesus' words were useful, wise, life-giving, and true. Sometimes I find myself silent when I need to speak and speaking when silence would be more helpful. Sometimes I wish I could hit the delete button and erase the last paragraph of angry words. But that is not possible. Words go out and have that effect. How good to know Jesus lives in me and my hope is that He will speak His words through me.

We've all had this happen: not flattering, but encouragement; not emotionalism, but sincere love; not anger, but correction and training in righteousness; not self-promotion, but God honoring words. What a delight to the ears! What a joy for the listener! What a mystery, God in us.

By His death, by our death to self, this happens. His lips drip myrrh. His lips indicate speech that was God's words since He only spoke what the Father said.

In summary, I'd like to add an incident in Watchmen Nee's life. He was seeing great success; the church was growing, there were people from every strata of society and all crowded in together to listen to the clear Word of God. People who could not fit inside, crowded outside near the windows to listen via loudspeakers.

But missionaries of major denominations, who were losing members to him, began to slander him saying he was receiving foreign funds and calling him a "sheep stealer". In response, Watchman Nee went off to a secluded area, his bedroom! One missionary visitor insisted he would see her as she had a "word from the LORD": "No weapon that is fashioned against thee shall prosper, and every tongue that rises up in judgment thou shalt condemn." A contemporary Chinese worker came and told him to try praising the LORD. He said, "I'll try." He went out to the tennis courts and yelled "Hallelujah!" He was back to work after that.

It is Dan and my experience that praising God in the face of bad news (being criticized before our mission and the Turkish leadership, having a car stolen, hearing bad news from home etc.) does indeed bring the Spirit close and makes the demons of despair, depression, and defeat flee. Hallelujah! Our God reigns. Jesus never fails.

Lord, live Your life in me today. "I want nothing for myself. I want everything for Jesus." (original words of Margaret E Barber, quoted and used by Watchmen Nee.)

Day 37

Song of Songs 5:14-16

“His hands are disks of gold set with emerald. His chest is a block of ivory covered with sapphires. His legs are columns of marble set on bases of gold. His form is like Lebanon, choice as the cedars. His mouth is sweet in every way. EVERYTHING ABOUT HIM IS DESIRABLE! This is my Beloved, and this is my friend young women of Jerusalem.” (Capitals mine for emphasis)

How would you describe the Groom –King? The bride has chosen the most precious minerals of the earth; the most valued things. He is precious, superior, and completely solid! He is without flaw or fault. He is totally valuable. Rev. 4:3 tells us there is an emerald looking rainbow around His throne in heaven. Rev. 21:19 tells us the very foundation of the city wall in heaven includes sapphire, emerald, and the streets are gold. The walls are marble decorated with all these precious stones.

In Exodus 28:18 these precious gems were put on the breastplate of the ephod worn by the priest of Israel. This gains significance when we see that originally, these were on Lucifer. (Ezekiel 28:13) Do you see what her Beloved has done? He has taken the most precious stones that He possesses, removed them from the one who rebelled, and put them on the priest’s garments.

Zechariah 3:1-10 is the account of Satan the Accuser pointing out all the flaws and filth of the chief priest. But YAHWEH, instead of agreeing with him by saying, “Yeah, what a mess-up,” silences Satan! In truth, the chief priest was indeed “wearing filthy clothes”, but

He put a turban on his head and dressed him (sound like Eph 6:10-20?) and tells the priest that he will govern His temple and watch over His courtyards! He will be given “free access” to heaven! All because of the Groom-King, the Branch, who will remove sin in a single day!

Can you think of a better gift? All filth removed—clothing without blemish; the right to walk in heaven now! This is why the bride is lovesick! Who would not follow this Groom-King? Authority is restored. The Accuser is diminished.

Everything mentioned about her Beloved is pure, referring to Divinity, and solid. The Lebanon cedars refer to lofty heights, God’s perspective: His omniscience. Ivory is very valuable, and rare. Her Beloved is without comparison.

I don’t know what the Accuser is whispering to you about yourself (for we are the priesthood of believers. I Peter 2:9-10) But our Groom-King silenced the Accuser. Why listen to his prattle when Yahweh himself has granted you purity and authority in heaven and earth. Let’s listen to Him and Him only. Like the bride in Song of Songs my heart pants for you, my Bridegroom King. Everything about you is desirable.

Day 38

Song of Songs 6:1-3

“Where did your beloved go, most beautiful of women? Where did your beloved turn? We will look for him with you.”

He is the one who grazes his flock among the lilies.”

“My Beloved went to his garden, to the bed of spices, to graze his flock in the gardens and gather lilies.

I am my Beloved's and He is mine.”

What has happened here? The passive pew sitters, the very daughters of Jerusalem have gone from looking at the bride to searching for her Beloved Groom-King. Would that the church, so passionate for the King, would draw the attention of the Jews to the Bridegroom King! But a change has occurred in the bride too. Her groom has not spoken to her, nor has she found Him yet. His manifest presence is still not evident and yet, just speaking about Him has calmed her and given her assurance of where He is. I Peter 1:8 speaks of this: “Although you have never seen Christ, you love him. You don't see Him now, but you believe in him. You are extremely happy with joy and praise that can hardly be expressed in words, as you obtain the salvation that is the goal of your faith.”

The greatest joy of the believer is to live their life here and never take offense. The greatest joy in life results from discovering God's great well of love and the life that is ours in Christ Jesus, no matter what our circumstances. The cloud of witnesses to this great life begins with the Old Testament heroes of our faith. For me the contemporary heroes are: Corrie Ten Boom, Joni Eareckson Tada, D.L.Moody, Billy Graham, James Elliot, Stuart and Jill Briscoe, and Audrey Tennant to name a few. They are all people who stayed the course despite great attack against them. They maintained a love walk so that no matter what happened they discovered the secret that their Beloved was there in

taking pleasure in their fragrance, and nurturing them “in the very presence of their enemies.” Psalm 23:5

This is victory! This is the life that says, “I know my Beloved, I know I belong to Him and He is mine.” To know this in our experience is to have tasted the truth of Romans 8:28-39 and will land us with Joseph, Job, and Daniel! Notice that when the bride says these words this time there is a change from Song of Songs 2:16. This time she realizes the true emphasis is that He has a right to her first. We belong to Him and therefore what we do, where we go, what we say all bear significance.

Our transition to Cyprus was going along well until a great cloud of uselessness, purposelessness, hopelessness came upon me. The enemy kept reminding me what a failure I was, and the torment was more than I could bear. It was so strange, because we are living in the most beautiful home, seeing the vast beauty of the sea, making new friends, and enjoying a slower pace. But the enemy was hounding me with a sense of uselessness. We had been under financial stress with the move and the need to buy a car in a very inflated market. The storm broke when two dear believers visited us. They served in Abu Dhabi for 17 years and were in transition here on the island after their son had a climbing accident that reduced him to a shuffling form of what he was before. But their son’s inner man (and his parents for that matter) remained brilliant, kind, and stunning. As they sat at our table the words of hopelessness and despair that I had struggled with began to come out of my mouth.

The man rebuked the lies and prayed over me a deliverance prayer.

Today's devotion completed the task and I was able to testify the goodness of God to a Cypriot lady under this oppression last night. No matter what is going on, no matter what the Accuser says, we are loved, chosen, made blameless in His sight. It makes all the difference in the world to know this and believe it. We know we are His and He is ours and nothing can steal that away for He feeds His flock among the lilies (all that is pure).

Day 39

Song of Songs 6:4-5

"You are beautiful, my true love, like Tirzah, lovely like Jerusalem, awe-inspiring like those great cities. Turn your eyes away from me, they enchant me!"

The Groom speaks. He has been the unseen guest all the time. He has heard her words of praise of Him in the midst of her suffering and His heart is overwhelmed! Malachi 3:16 confirms for us that God does indeed listen in on our conversations of Him.

"Then those who feared Yahweh spoke to one another, and Yahweh paid attention and listened. A book was written in his presence to be a reminder to those who feared Yahweh and respected his name."

Last night as I told my friend about the God she doesn't yet know I could feel the warmth of His Presence. He does draw nigh to those who love Him and speak accurately of His great heart. She had lost her mother and the emptiness was more than her heart can bear.

“We are not plants,” I told her, “that our death results in a simple rotting back into the earth. Look around you at God’s creation. Didn’t He turn the caterpillar into the butterfly? Which form is more to be desired, the former or the latter? Our bodies will be changed to a more glorious one. We are designed to know God and live with Him forever. You do not know what took place between your mother and her Creator in the last moments of her life. But we do know that God is loving beyond our imaginations. He is good and He has made a way for us to live with Him forever. The blood of Jesus is enough to cleanse the sin and filth of everyone on the planet!”

“It is funny you mention butterflies,” she said. “My brother dropped off a bag of my mother’s things she’d left at the hospital and that I had not thought to take the night she died. In it was a T-shirt that I was horrified to see.

“This cannot belong to my mom,” she continued, “for it had a horrible skull and a horse that was half horse and half skeleton.” However, a few days later my friend discovered through a friend of her mother’s that it was indeed her T-shirt. The neighbor had asked her why she would wear such a horrible T-shirt and amusingly found out the mom had not even noticed the skeleton or the horse, for her eyes were attracted to the butterflies and flowers that bordered the shirt. My friend went on to say that when she went to her family’s home to gather other things of her mom’s there was a butterfly in the room. When she mentioned this to a neighbor next door the lady said, “We have been talking about the vast number of butterflies in your mom’s garden while we, right next

door, have not a single one!"

"Can't you see God in His creation trying to show you His design? He doesn't intend death to be the end of us, but there is so much more, and He has made a way for us to live with Him forever."

We spoke much more, while the hands on the clock moved without our notice. And as we spoke, I felt His great pleasure. He had planned this appointment and I was just in the right place at the right time.

Be confident that God is there with you today. He is the unseen guest in your conversations. He is love and He is touched by our words of praise when we don't see Him yet. We live in a time of great opportunity. Live today, confident of who He is, who you are as His bride, and where you are headed. Hallelujah!

Day 40

Song of Songs 6:5b-7

"Your hair is like a flock of goats moving down from Gilead. Your teeth are like a flock of sheep, sheep that come up from washing. All of them bear twins, not one has lost its young. Your temples behind your veil are like slices of pomegranate."

Here the Groom-King expresses how He sees her, after watching her go through her trial without complaint and totally lovesick. He is moved by her, and begins to describe her yet again as he did in chapter 4. In that chapter He was proclaiming it, almost as if His words would create this character in her, but in chapter 6 He is describing what He has seen. She has become this

person He proclaimed in chapter 4 as evidenced in her response to the stress, pressure, and trial of chapter 5.

I want to mention something about the “flock of goats moving down from Gilead.” Last summer we had the joy of staying in the tents of the Kurds camped on the base of Mount Ararat. They take their sheep and goats up to the lush fields to graze throughout the summer months. As we prepared to eat our evening meal the shepherd took off with his flock. Before long we saw him in the distance and the effect of the herd moving was a bit like wavy hair blowing in a breeze! But that Gilead is mentioned twice in Chapters 4 and 6 makes it a significant detail.

Gilead was the Eastern border of the Promised Land. In it a balm was produced that had healing qualities. Jer 8:11 asks Israel if there is “no balm in Gilead” because they had become such an idolatrous nation and later the prophet Zechariah tells them to “go to Gilead and be healed.” Whether we are Jew or Gentile we have to go to the God of Israel for healing. The bride, in her love relation to the Groom-King has hair (a sign of dedication) that will carry healing to the nations. When God’s people live free of the world and full of His Spirit they become a place of healing for others.

Her teeth, able to chew the meat of the Word and get nutrition, shows she is able to nurture others now, not losing her young.

Her emotions, indicated by the reference to temples, are like God’s. She is no longer controlled by the negative flow of self-focus and self-obsession, but she

is totally moved by her attachment to Him alone. She feels what HE feels. Sometimes Jesus was moved by compassion and healed people. Sometimes he felt righteous anger. She now has the inner peace of heaven that controls her life.

Such a believer is grieved by that which grieves the Father, whether in their own life or in their surroundings. This is one who can discern spirits. They sense what God senses and their very emotions reflect His.

How did she get to such a place? She followed the flocks He led, focused on Him alone, and wasn't offended when everything didn't go her way. Today is our day to follow the King, to not be offended and to discover the riches of His gift to us in Christ Jesus. Yes, LORD, we say yes to You today.

Day 41

Song of Songs 6:8-9

“There are 60 queens, 80 concubines and countless virgins, but she is unique, my dove, my perfect one. Her mother thinks she is unique. She is pure to the one who gave birth to her. Her sisters saw her and blessed her. Queens and concubines saw her and praised her.”

Admittedly this is a strange comfort to a bride at first glance! This is Solomon and he indeed did have many wives (1000), and many concubines. But from the perspective of our Bridegroom King, it is right for Him to have so many, for He is the Savior of the world and each soul He pulls out of the clutches of His enemy, whether male or female, will become His bride.

How like Him, who created each snowflake to be different, who knows each star by name, to see each of us as totally unique. Would that we as parents could love each of our children so perfectly that they would have their first taste of our Father's complete love in our homes!

Many times as my boys were growing up in Turkey ladies would ask me, "Which son do you love the most?" At first I would answer this with a generic, "I love them all the same," to which they'd respond, "Yes, but which one is really special to you?" So, I developed a different way of answering. It went like this:

"Derek is our firstborn son. He is such a brilliant problem solver and he is so brave. He never speaks negatively of others, never tattles or seems to take offense. He helped his Dad tear down walls and build them up again. He is a hard worker." Just as they were nodding their heads as if they'd gotten their answer I'd continue.

"Andrew is my second son. He is merciful and kind. He has a sense about what others are feeling and draws alongside to help. Wherever we go, he makes friends. People love to be around him. He makes me laugh from deep down. I loved him from the first day I held him. His big brown eyes were mesmerizing to me. He brought so much joy to my heart." They were looking a little confused, so before they spoke I went on.

Peter is brilliant. He memorized a passage of about 12 verses when he was 3 years old and stood before an entire school assembly to quote it. He has a keen sense of what is right and does it. He is quick and

delights to learn, work hard, and seems to be successful at whatever he puts his hand to. “ By this time they were nodding their heads. “You love them all.”

How much more does God, who knit us together and gave us our strengths and talents, love to watch us grow, to see us use the gifts He gave to serve others and sees us as unique. He has made us pure and blameless. Never should we focus on trying to do this for ourselves. To focus on sin only makes its hold that much stronger. No, the way out of sin’s stronghold is to gaze at Jesus and believe what He says is true.

Confessing sin means simply agreeing with God that it is nasty and wrong. Acknowledging this brings a blood cleansing but the Bible promises more. I John 1:9 continues to say, “He cleanses us from everything we’ve done wrong.” Another version says it this way, “to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” This means we are not only forgiven, but changed. Who can fathom the incredible gift of our salvation!

And so the bride of Song of Songs went from the guilt and shame of the first chapter to the one even the church sees as “unique and pure”. The other queens and concubines see this and praise her. Lord, we rest in Your provision of righteousness today and want this day to live with and for You.

Day 42

Song of Songs 6:10-12

“Who is this woman? She looks like the dawn. She is beautiful like the moon, pure like the sun, awe-

“I went to the walnut grove to look at the blossoms in the valley, to see if the grapevine had budded and if the pomegranates were in bloom. I did not know I had become like the chariots of my noble people.”

The daughters of Jerusalem can scarcely recognize the Shulamite woman. She is so different than at the beginning of the book. She has been transformed by following His flock and by the trials she faced.

Philippians 2:14-15 states that if we do everything without arguing or complaining (if we refuse to get offended) we will shine like stars in this crooked and corrupt world. This is what God sees. II Cor. 2:14-17 states we are like pieces of Scripture walking about, letters of demonstration of what it is to be in Christ. We carry His very fragrance and to some it means life and to others it is the aroma of death, for it brings conviction of sin. This is what people around us see.

I remember living with my parents again as a new believer. I had taken on a teaching position in a new Christian school in Waukesha, WI. They could not pay much (as it was started by 5 families). One night as I was up late correcting papers my Mom, who had had too much to drink, decided to talk to me. “You are ridiculous,” she slurred, “Why don’t you like me to smoke?” I had never even thought about her smoking.

She was not a believer yet and I did not expect her to behave like one, but she felt I was judging her. This was my first experience of this verse in living color. (I need to add here that many years later my mom also found Christ. Today she reads prays the Word and prays for me daily. She is an excellent mother.)

The bride goes to the walnut grove. She is checking on the buds and blossoms of others in God's vineyard. Believers, once their eyes are no longer focused on themselves, become very productive workers in God's work. They become concerned for others. The King had invited her in chapter 2 to see the blossoms, but at that time the foxes in her own vineyard were causing trouble that needed her attention. Now she is available to help in the work. Her trials have resulted in selflessness, and the freedom to work in His vineyard caring for others.

The progression in our lives might not be so unilateral. We may digress backwards, but always this is where the King is leading us: to selfless service, concerned for others and walking with the King. She is unaware that she has begun to carry the King with her wherever she goes and therefore is radiant. She is so not focused on self that she is unaware what others see. Her doves eyes are on Him and now she is looking outward and seeing the needs of those around her. She has become one of the noble people, but she no longer has eyes for herself. What a paradox! What a joy!

We are His handiwork and I'm confident He will complete what He has started.

Father, as I go out the door today, give me eyes to see the needs of others. Use these hands and fill my time with the work of the King. Psalm 90:15-17 says: "Make us rejoice for as many days as you have made us suffer, for as many years as we have experienced evil. Let us, your servants, see what You can do, Let your children see your glorious power. Let the kindness of

our Elohim be with us. Make us successful in everything we do. Yes, make us successful in everything we do.”

Day 43

Song of Songs 6:13

“Come back! Come back young woman from Shulam. Come back! Come back so that we may look at you.”
 “Why do you look at me, the young woman from Shulam as you look at the dance of Mahanaim?”

Another translation states it this way: “Why should you look upon the Shulamite as upon a dance before two armies?”

This is a very mysterious verse with two very different versions. In one translation the Shulamite is speaking about herself and in the other the Groom is speaking. In both of the versions the daughters of Jerusalem do not want her to leave, as they want to continue to watch her grow, change and mature.

It is always easier to focus on the growth of others. But Paul states that he doesn't even focus on his own growth! He focuses on the race ahead and runs to win! Don't keep looking back; that is a good way to lose a race! The past cannot be changed by staring back at it.

Tomorrow is not ours to live yet. Today alone we have our chance to trust God and live for Him. Today is the time to make our decision.

Watchman Nee's words to his fellow believers as communism was taking over his country was to encourage them to do what was right, however, they needed to never act in conflict with the Word of God,

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nor deny their Lord. What a great attitude to put on daily in any circumstance!

The daughters of Jerusalem were sad to see the Shulamite leave, to go to the vineyards, to go to do the work of the church. Their sense of loss is very deep. Their words in verse 10 are inspired by the change they see in her.

Passionate pursuit of the Groom attracts attention, especially when the person makes it through a great trial with their faith and their heart in tact, still lovesick for Jesus.

The Sunday after we received the criticism letter, as we walked in the church there were people handing us notes of comfort, and others, like the watchmen here, watching us with distaste. The important thing was that our eyes were focused on our Beloved, who had not changed one bit. Our glorious King remains the same, His love endures forever and NOTHING can separate us from His great ocean of love. Not criticism letters, not personal failure, not mocking words.

Whatever happens then today, LORD, we are focused on you, the “fount of every blessing”, the unchangeable one, the heavenly Bridegroom. Let all our actions today be in alignment with Your Word and Your character. May our lives not deny that you are the victor.

Day 44**Song of Songs 7:1-3**

“How beautiful are your feet in their sandals, noble daughter! The curves of your thighs are like ornaments, like the work of an artist’s hands. Your navel is a round bowl. May it always be filled with spiced wine. Your waist is a bundle of wheat enclosed in lilies. Your breasts are like two fawns, twins of a gazelle.”

A tremendous transition has taken place in the bride since the crises of chapter 5. She is no longer the fearful lady struggling with guilt, shame, and self-focus. Her eyes are on her Beloved and she, by her not taking an offense during her trial, has charmed Him completely.

She is, after all, His handiwork. And now, she is described in images that suggest maturity. The immature girl has no curves. This bride is mature and productive, compared to wheat and wine. Do these words ring a bell? Bread and wine surely remind us of the Lord’s Supper where it is the bread of forgiveness and the wine of resurrected life. Here is a believer that is dead to self and ever so available to the King to work in His vineyard.

Spiced wine is the new wine that Jesus brings to our lives. This is His life lived in us (Christ in us, the hope of glory. Col 1:27) Jesus, the best wine, enters the life of the believer and brings His very DNA to bear on every activity. There is no comparison to this kind of life.

Wherever this person goes, she is nobility, an ambassador of Christ, carrying the Kingdom of heaven into the dreary situation of earth.

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The bride has begun her life of service in Chapter 7. She carries the Good News as mentioned in Isaiah 52:7. "How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces the good news," all is well.

He brings the good news, announces salvation, and tells Zion that its Elohim rules as King. "Yahweh will comfort His people...Yahweh will show His holy power to all the nations. All the ends of the earth will see the salvation of our ELOHIM!" (Isaiah 52:9-10)

John the Baptist said of Him, "I am not worthy to remove his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire." In Matt 3:11b Jesus is the one who would bring us Good News. His very arrival on the planet was an event of such immense impact that angels could not contain their joy and praise and manifested in the skies to the shepherds surrounding Bethlehem. Myriads of angels were singing. What a momentous moment. What a hope for men. What a message to carry to the nations. What a privilege for the bride to take up the call. This bride, no longer focused on herself, is ready to go, ready to bear fruit for her King.

Lord, use our feet today to take this message out. You have come, let everyone hear the Good News. May we carry your spiced wine into each situation until we see others feed on your bread of life.

Day 45

Song of Songs 7:4-5

"Your neck is like an ivory tower, your eyes are like pools in Heshbon, pools by the gate of Bath-Rabbim.

Your nose is like a Lebanese Tower facing Damascus. You hold your head as high as Mt. Carmel. Your dangling curls are royal beauty. Your flowing locks could hold a King captive.”

The words of the Groom continue to describe her in the most royal terms. In these verses the picture painted is one whose will, mind, and entire attitude is set like flint. She is very far from the self-conscious, shamed young lady of chapter one. Her neck, indicating her will, is a tower of strength. Her eyes are compared to the pools of Heshbon, by the gate of Bath-rabbim. Baths were pools, thermally heated and used for healing, but “Bath-rabbim is not the name of any known place. It means “daughter of multitudes. The church, made up of people from every tribe and tongue will be a place filled with fish, the picture of new believers.

Our Savior is not going to be disappointed when He returns. He will find a bride ready, whose will is to do what He asks, whose eyes are absolute pools of the multitudes that were saved and healed, whose nose is set. This bride is not downcast, but confident. Her head is held high. She is washed in the blood of the Lamb and shame has no place in her. Even her hair is a sign of her being set aside for royalty. Everything about her brings her King pleasure, and captivates his heart. The end times church will be the Bride that Jesus deserves.

There is a moment in the wedding ceremony when the bride dressed in white, steps into the view of the congregation.

If the bride has paused outside the sanctuary, the mind of those waiting have a chance to imagine the king awaiting His bride. Jesus is waiting for His bride to prepare herself.

We love to see the bride, who for months has planned, dress, hair, shoes, and body for this moment when every eye will be upon her. It may be the only time in her life when she has everyone's ultimate attention and she will be silent and regal as she walks slowly down the aisle to her Groom.

When my boys were born I began to pray for their wives. Deep down I wanted them to be men of integrity, who walked by faith and had no shame. Of course, I longed too for them to choose wives who were also children of the King, people of integrity and royalty. So far two of my sons found their brides and my prayers were answered. I've no doubt the third will also complete this picture.

How much more does the King of Kings and Lord of Lords deserve a bride of excellence. How long has He waited?

He is captivated by His Bride. We have ravished His heart and He is enjoying our will, mind, and entire positioning towards His desire. Let today demonstrate that You are first and foremost in my mind. Let this life be one set like flint toward doing Your will. And let this soul be part of the multitudes that will greet You upon Your return with no shame. Amen

Day 46

Song of Songs 7:6-9a

“How beautiful and charming you are, my love, with your elegance. Young woman, your figure is like a palm tree, and your breasts are like its clusters. I thought, “I will climb the palm tree and take hold of its fruit. May your breasts be like clusters on the vine. May the fragrance of your breath be like apples. May your mouth taste like the best wine.”

The Groom finishes his expressions of love by telling her what the overall effect of her beauty is on him. His descriptions of her are references of maturity. This believer is mature, able to nurture others and pleasing to the LORD. This believer has His attention, and the believer that has His attention receives the outpouring of the Spirit, when God Himself takes hold of His vessels and fills them for service. This is not a formal church dedication time, it is a private personal encounter between an individual and the Living God.

This person has breath that smells like apples. Remembering that Jesus is the apple tree, this is one who has eaten so much of His Word that their speech sounds like Him.

“After they found out that Peter and John had no education or formal training, they were surprised to see HOW BOLDLY THEY SPOKE. They realized that these men had been with Yeshua.” Acts 4:13

There is no substitute (in the life of a believer) for time spent with Jesus. James says, “If someone doesn’t make any mistakes when he speaks, he would be perfect.” James 3:2 Only Jesus was a perfect man.

His words were helpful for those who listened. His words brought life and light. He still does, and He uses us. Lord make my tongue “the pen of a ready writer.” (Psalm 45:1)

Let your words tumble out of your people today, giving life to all that hear. What a delight it is to sit at the feet of those who walk with Jesus. In my life the time I spent listening to Jill Briscoe, or walking with Audrey Tennant was always time well spent. We all need friends that inspire us with their words and example. And, ready or not, we are inspiring others with our words and our life. So, like David, let us pray that the words of our mouth and the meditation of our heart be pleasing to our King today. (Psalm 19:14) Father, live Your life in us, spread your love abroad through my heart.

Day 47

Song of Songs 7:9b

“That goes down smoothly to my beloved and glides over the lips of those about to sleep. I am my Beloved’s and He longs for me. Come my Beloved, let’s go into the field. Let’s spend the night among the henna flowers (in the villages). Let’s go to the vineyards early. Let’s see if the vines have budded, if the grape blossoms have opened, if the pomegranates are in bloom. There I will give You my love.”

Here the mature believer receives the truth that he/she is loved. So many mornings I wake up feeling inadequate or a failure because of some irritability the day before. I guess this is starting the day realizing I am a debtor to God.

Then these words pound in, "He longs for me." Our faith walk is believing He has my sanctification under control. He will complete what He has started. My work is to believe what He says about His love and desire. When I realize I am loved my focus shifts from me to Him He is my hope. He is the object of my faith.

The bride says His words and expressions of love go down smoothly, "gliding over the lips of those about to sleep." The picture is of one putting the best wine to the lips of a dying friend, and they are revived by it. So the truth: God loves me, revives the faint-hearted and brings a bounce to our step. As a new believer, when I realized He loved me and covered over all my sin it didn't matter if I was cleaning, waitressing, or out to supper with a friend, my heart was full of joy.

Therefore, one Memorial Day, I went into the restaurant to work full of joy. There were police officers drinking their free coffee and feeling sorry for themselves for having to work while all the families were picnicking. One officer noticed the bounce in my step and mumbled, "What are you so happy about?" My mind took in the question and realized the answer would challenge him, "You wouldn't want to know." I took the food out to the people waiting and upon returning he continued, "Now I really want to know." "Seriously, it is not something you will like to hear." "I want to know, why are you so happy?" "Jesus has lifted the entire weight of sin off my shoulders. The lightness of this and the knowledge that He loves me makes everyday every job special." Pause of silence..."You're right, I didn't want to know."

"The person who isn't spiritual doesn't accept the things of God's Spirit. He thinks they are nonsense."
I Cor. 2:14

But the Bride, full of the Spirit, the life and love of God, has energy for His work. Any job is an exciting job.

Notice the difference between Song of Songs 2:16 and here in 7:10. He is not so much hers, as she is His , and that is enough. The relationship of a new believer to the LORD is so different from someone who has walked with Him and grown in wisdom. The new love is replaced with a deep respect and abiding love that carries with it the experiences the believer has had of pruning and training. How lovely for her to now say, "I am my Beloved's and He longs for me." Now, it is all about Him and all her worth is to be found in that: that she is desired by Him. So, we understand John never referring to himself as John, but as "the disciple Jesus loved."

No longer self-focused or concerned about herself at all, she is confident that God loves her and "will perfect that which concerns her." (Psalm 138:8). She is free now to care for others.

Rick Joyner says: "Depression is the deception that comes from seeing the world from your perspective...When you dwell in the Presence you will not see anything but glory...Don't be consumed with maintaining a feeling, focus on the Source."

Jesus says, "When you abide in me" you will see the truth that triumphs over darkness. So let's step out today confident that we are loved and let God do His work through us." (Romans 5:8)

Day 48

Song of Songs 7:13

“The mandrakes give off a fragrance, and at our door are all kinds of precious fruits. I have saved new and old things for you alone, my Beloved.”

It is so wonderful to hear the bride showing her love for her Groom King. She is no longer just wanting to receive, but is also giving out of a heart that is full. What a transformation!

When my sister Laura died I was having a hard time imagining how daily life would carry on without her cheerful presence. Every time I returned to the States from Turkey, it was Laura who would greet us at the airport.

Even if she had a migraine, she was there. She would prepare a place for us full of love and precious things. She would send Christmas packages for us, or tuck her gifts into my Mom’s boxes. She loved us well.

My sister Sharon and I sat around the picnic table outside Laura’s house, grieving, silent, overwhelmed by loss. “How are we supposed to go on living now?” I asked Sharon. Eyes red and heart heavy she echoed my words with “I don’t know.” Then, as if the LORD was right there with us, He sent an unusual bird to fly right in between us and perch at the base of Laura’s sliding glass doors, looking in, bobbing its head several times as if looking for her, and then it flew off. It was a stunningly beautiful bird that I’d never seen before. It was shaped like a cardinal, but of an olive green color with a bright lemon yellow stripe on the edge of the tail and a tuft of feathers on its head. I now know it was a cedar waxwing, but then it was

“Sharon, there is our answer. Just as Laura endured the pain of these past months by watching the birds build their nests or the Morning Glories opening up, so we are to continue on focused on God’s creation and all that He is doing.”

There are many things to see, feel, hear, or touch that God sends our way each day to remind us of His love for us and His Presence near us. Here the Bride is inhaling that which stimulates her love and appreciation for God. Her response to His creation opens her mind to all His goodness all around her.

“At our door” refers to the fact that God lives with her. All around her are precious things to share with Him.

“I have saved new and old things, for you alone my Beloved.” She has a treasury of memories of things in her life that He has done and things He is doing. Intimacy with God means that they share a life full of memories. Jesus is the One who sticks closer than a brother. (Proverbs 18:24)

He is there on good days and on sad ones. He transforms our moments by His Presence and fills our lives so that we have treasures new and old to share with Him.

Lord, how precious these moments in the morning with You are. How rare are your treasures to us, and how priceless that we can walk through this day with You. I love you.

Day 49

Song of Songs 8:1-4

“If only you were my brother, one who nursed at my mother’s breast. If I saw you on the street, I would kiss you, and no one would look down on me. I would lead You. I would bring You into my mother’s house. (She is the one who was my teacher.) I would give you some spiced wine to drink, some juice squeezed from my pomegranates. His left hand under my head, His right hand caresses me. Young women of Jerusalem, swear to me that you will not awaken love or arouse love before its proper time.”

The bride wants to show her love for the King openly and boldly. If they had been siblings showing her love openly would be acceptable anytime, any place. She could express her feelings without any condemnation from others.

One day I was sitting in a restaurant sharing the Gospel with a fellow worker from our restaurant. He was the cook and I was an assistant manager at that time. The deeper I got about spiritual things the more uncomfortable he got. He was looking to the left and the right in obvious discomfort. I’ve learned that these uncomfortable times are truly teachable moments, so I decided to point out the obvious. “You seem uncomfortable talking about God in public.” He looked up at me, surprised that I’d noticed. “Isn’t it funny that we are talking about such good and wholesome things, about the love of God, and yet the world around you is trying to make you feel ashamed of it; while the couple

right across from us have been making out openly the whole time we've been here and they, who should feel shame, feel none at all."

He laughed embarrassedly and took time to notice the couple whose booth was a continuation of ours.

"Yeah, that's strange."

"It just shows you the warfare that goes on when the Gospel is spoken. If there was no power in the things I'm saying, then there would be no battle going on. But, as it is, there is a huge battle going on in the heavenlies for your soul." If my memory serves me correctly, that young man, Steve, came to Christ a few weeks later.

The Bride is so enthralled with her King, that she wants to bring Him into her home. Our family is where our witness begins. If family members don't notice a change in you, then I question if you are truly born again. The Spirit wars with the power of the Prince of the air. Jesus' Presence in our bodies brings the kingdom of heaven into the dominion of darkness and, as surely as the money changers went flying out of the temple, bad habits and old ways will go out of our lives.

At this point in her walk with her Groom-King, she is head over heels in love. She does not care how she looks to others and her relationship to Him coupled with her freedom from self-focus has filled her life with incredible energy. She even envisions herself giving Him the best wine. This is not presumption; it is her reality. God has chosen to do His work on earth through man. (Psalm 115:16) He breathes life into us, inspires and enthuses us to do His will, empowers us to carry it out and thus glorifies Himself in us. What a

mystery! And this is the normal Christian life. She is a normal believer who has tasted the best wine. She will never be the same.

She is aware of blessings hidden and blessings that are observable. The inner peace undergirding us through all life's trials are one of the hidden blessings. Provision of a mate to walk through life with or financial gifts as we need it are more obvious blessings.

She ends with an admonition not to awaken love until the right time. We are all created with this need for the love of God to fill us; but most people busily try to fill it with addiction, relationships, work, striving to succeed, longing to count. The only passion that does not consume us, but instead energizes us is the love that is ours in Christ Jesus.

Day 50
Song of Songs 8:5

"Who is this coming up from the wilderness, leaning on her Beloved?"

Groom: "Under the apple tree I awakened you. There your mother was in labor with you; there she who bore you was in labor."

In this last stage of spiritual maturity we see the believer leaning on her Beloved. No self-confidence left, no self-righteousness to hinder her view of her Beloved. Self-pity and self-consciousness are gone forever. Her life depends on resting in Him. Heb. 4:3a "for we who have believed enter that rest.." Hebrews 6:1 "Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrines of Christ and go on to maturity.."

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Our faith walk is so much more than a list of doctrines or worse yet, a list of do's and don'ts. No, we are in relationship with the Bridegroom King, who loves us, who silences the Accuser and sees us as He has created us: beautiful, blameless, and without flaw. (Col.1:21-22)

We came to life under the apple tree, Jesus, and continue our walk leaning on Him, lovesick and dependent. It is interesting to me that the Bride was actually already under the apple tree when he woke her, and then the church (her mother) labored with her to bring her to birth. Coming to Christ is a process and His eye is on us all the way, but it doesn't stop there. The church is vital in bringing the maiden to completion, as one who is mature and sanctified. All of Song of Songs points to the fact that Christian maturity is a process, each chapter showing her growing in her depth of commitment. Yes, Jesus made the way possible, but the believer works with Him in this process. Many believers will spend their whole faith walk in chapters 1 and 2. It takes obedience and diligent search to discover all that God has for us in Christ Jesus.

Every religious spirit strives to get us focused on self and working to please God. But those who walk by faith grow in grace. They become gracious people, confident that God will do exactly what He says. They read His words and are changed by them, and become interested in the things that concern His heart. Their faith in Him gives passage to His doing His work through them.

I remember the day the LORD called me to let go of all self-confidence.

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We were being sent home for the first time, 2 weeks before Christmas. Instead of decorating a tree and baking Christmas cookies, we were packing, and wondering where we would live in such a short notice. The shock of it left me crying every 10 minutes and sapped of strength, so I closed the door to our study and opened the Bible, expecting God to counsel me. Counsel me He did, but initially, it was not comforting! My eyes came to Psalm 52 and the words that stood out were:

Verse 1: "Why do you boast of evil, mighty man?" God opened up my understanding to know how this applied to me: You are so confident in your own ability to learn the language and make friends. This self-confidence is not what pleases God.

Verse 2: "Your tongue plots destruction." The Lord revealed to me that even at that moment my heart wanted to exaggerate the wrong done to me and minimize my own faults.

Verse 4: "You love words that devour". This is what happens when we are wounded or attacked by others. The heart of man wants to hurt the offender, but in doing so reveals a murderous heart of his own.

Verse 5: "But God will break you down forever and tear you from your tent; he will uproot you from the land of the Living." Was I not being uprooted from my team and my home? People want to believe that once they become a believer nothing bad will ever happen to them. My experience is that this is not true. Bad things continue to happen, and as they do God shapes us and trains us to die to self. Did He not discipline Israel?

“Endure your discipline. God corrects you as a father corrects his children. All children are disciplined by their fathers. If you aren’t disciplined like the other children, you aren’t part of the family.” (Hebrews 12:7-8)

Verse 6: “The righteous will see and fear and shall laugh at him saying, ‘See the man who would not make God his refuge, but trusted in the abundance of his riches.’” All self-confidence needs to be let go and only God confidence remain. By this time I was sobbing uncontrollably. I had read to the bottom of that page in my Bible and determined enough was enough. But God pressed in on me, as if I heard him say in my heart, “Turn the page and continue.”

“Lord, it is too much for me to bear.”

“Turn the page and continue.”

I turned the page and read verse 8: “But I am like a green olive tree in the house of God. I trust in the steadfast love of God forever and ever.” Suddenly, I was given God’s perspective on all that was happening to me. All that was dying was the old man! Like Eustace in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, only Aslan can remove your dragon skin, and it hurts. This children’s book that I’d read as a new believer at age 24 had confused then, but made great sense at that moment.

Verse 9: “I will thank You forever because you have done it! I will wait for your name, for it is good in the presence of the Godly.” Praise God! Let the old man die. For my life is hidden in Christ alone. What a great time of counseling. I was confronted on things that had to change, and I was given hope that made me realize God was in it all. I believe You will live Your life in me

Today, LORD I rest in Your finished work on the cross.
This is a lifestyle of learning.

Day 51

Song of Songs 8:6-7

“Wear me as a signet ring on your heart, as a ring on your hand. Love is as overpowering as death.

Devotion is as unyielding as the grave. Love’s flames are flames of fire, flames that come from Yah. Raging water cannot extinguish love, and rivers will never wash it away. If a man exchanged all his family’s wealth for love, people would utterly despise him.”

Here the Groom speaks of His ring. Our engagement ring is worn on our heart. As a newly engaged person the ring brings with it a proclamation that we are chosen, we are no longer available to anyone else.

We belong to someone and He belongs to us. But for our Groom King the ring carries far more weight. It carries authority, protection, and even status and value. “I am His and He is mine.” No longer alone, no longer struggling with identity crises, the Bride is delivered from a life of loneliness and confusion. She is sealed into significance: a bride of the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. So, she must carry herself thus, His forever.

And the love she receives from her Broom can never be taken away. The response of such a gift is significance and relevance. Her life, wherever she is, carries purpose. She is the representative of heaven in that place. The motive for all her actions stems from His love flowing through her. She sees what He sees, and

speaks what He wants said. No longer locked in selfishness, she can live a life that counts. His love for her will carry Jesus right to the cross. He will face death for His Bride and conquer it.

Who can imagine this kind of love? Jesus did not defeat death, so we would live our lives in fear of it. No, He changed everything. Now, instead of death and the grave motivating fear that drives people through their earth time, we can be totally controlled by His love. Grace reigns and the Bride is free from fear, free to love. It will continue wherever she finds herself. Peace, love, hope, and faith will fill all her actions and all of her days.

Of course, the world cannot understand a life lived this way. Be extravagant in your service to God and you will be criticized. Set aside earthly treasure to find more of Him and you will be the target of ridicule. Decide to fast and you will be suspect by those trying to see how close to the line they can live and still be acceptable. But we are not the type that stays as close to the world as possible. We are over the top in love with the Bridegroom King.

Live extravagantly today, love whoever He brings across your path today.

The first time I tasted this love I was a 16 year old, very lost, girl in another country. I was totally self-absorbed and living as an American Field Service student. For one week I was in a small farming village on the west coast of the South Island of New Zealand. A family there had fought to get me to stay at their house.

They treated me as if I was so special, I couldn't understand them. They gave me a sheepskin the lady of the house had tanned herself. They threw a party to honor me and for one week I was loved so thoroughly I had to ask myself what was different about his family. They had family devotions and even now I remember the passage they read. (Matthew 21:28-32).

Later, when I came to Christ at the age of 24 I realized what this family had. They loved me because they were full of His love, not because I deserved it. Lord, you have given me so much, let it spill over to those I come in contact with today. Let someone taste Your love through me today. Thank you for the ring on my heart, for loving me so passionately that you would taste death for me. You have won my heart.

Day 52

Song of Songs 8:8-10

"We have a little sister, and she has no breasts, What will we do for our sister on the day she becomes engaged? If she is a wall, we will build a silver barrier around her. If she is a door, we will barricade her with cedar boards." "I am a wall, and my breasts are towers. So, he considers me to be one who has found peace."

The mature believers are concerned for the immature ones to discover what it is to have an open heart towards God. They will labor to see the new believer is protected from the attacks of the evil one, by building a sturdy firm wall of truth around them. Jesus is the cedar of Lebanon and He is the strongest protection we have. The one who is sheltered by Jesus, and whose

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anointing is guarded by the Most High, is truly safe indeed.

So many believers live to please men, to be accepted by man, that they never taste the incredible freedom God has planned for us. He has designed us to live for Him and Him alone. He notices all that is done in secret (prayer, concern for others, sacrificial giving) and He rewards us well, both now and later.

The bride realizes that new believers need protection and she is doing her part. "I am a wall." She does her part with supernatural strength hence the mention of towers. In the season she is spoken for "the new believer is entering into the Divine romance. It is a time the believer realizes God is in love with us, His creation. The response will be acceptance of the gifting He has given to either be a wall or a door. The wall refers to the gifts of apostle or prophet. These two create a safe place, speaking the Word of the Lord over those too young to discern for themselves.

The "door" ministries refer to pastor, evangelist, or teacher, where the goal is to open up Scriptures to those who have not yet heard. All these gifts equip others and enable them to join in the work of the King's vineyard.

The bride has discovered her role and she loves what she does. You truly know your gift by the joy you get in using it! She has supernatural strength to do her ministry and inwardly she maintains unusual peace. Her joy and peace continue, no matter what is going on around her. She is not looking for fame or approval of others, this died in chapter 5.

She knows she lives for an audience of one and is confident that she is in the right place at the right time. She is a believer who knows that her daily decisions matter for eternity. She is relevant and useful to her King and is experiencing joy and peace now, even before heaven. So, today, Lord, let me be love to all I come in contact with. Let me see what You see and serve You my king, with the supernatural gifts You've given to me to equip others. I say, "Yes" to You today.

Day 53**Song of Songs 8: 11-12**

"Solomon had a vineyard at Baal-hamon; he let out the vineyard to keepers; each one was to bring for its fruit a thousand pieces of silver. My vineyard, my very own, is before me; you, O Solomon, may have the thousand, and the keepers of the fruit two hundred."

Jesus has a vineyard. This is His world. There is no place named Baal-hamon, but the word means "Father of a multitude." Does this remind you of Gen.15? There God shows Abraham the sky and says, "Look toward the heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them, so shall your offspring be." (Gen 15:15)

Daniel told Nebuchadnessar the meaning of the dream of the statue of 4 great kingdoms of men, but a small rock, the Kingdom of Jesus, would knock it over and become a mountain of a kingdom. Jesus too referred to His Father's vineyard, left out to tenants who would kill the son. (Matthew 21:43) "Therefore I tell you, the Kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruits."

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This and the parable of the talents (Matthew 25:14-30) alert us to the importance of investing our lives wisely. I will not be responsible for another person's part of the vineyard, but I will give an account for the time, energy, and money given to me. This is no reason to be anxious, for our God notices the smallest action we make that is inspired by faith: -a widow gives 2 small copper coins (Luke 21:1-4)

-a boy gives 2 fish and 5 loaves of bread (Luke 9:10-17)

- a man cares about his servant (Luke 7:1-10)

-a cup of cold water given In His name (Matthew 10:42)

Whatever we give to Him, He notices. Everything we do because of faith gets His attention. And He will return and He will reward His children.

Sometimes our enemy tries to discourage us when we feel we haven't been successful. He tries to silence us when we are disappointed in the few people who have received our message. I remember the sense of total discouragement when someone I'd loved and disciplined for many years fell to adultery. It so devastated me, I seriously considered returning to Wisconsin and getting a secular job.

But instead, I asked Dan for one day off a week. On that day, I would put on worship music and just lay prostrate before God. "I will have no crowns to cast at your feet," I wept. The faces of many who had come into our church and left unchanged moved across my mind like a procession of witnesses before me in the courts of heaven. Then God touched me and I found myself praying in tongues. I do not believe you have to

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be speaking in tongues to be heard in heaven, but it seemed my prayer times wore me out as I rehearsed all my failures and reviewed my problems before the throne.

I would leave my prayer closet more worn out than I went in! That day the LORD lifted my focus from people, work, and problems, to Him. Every week my heart grew lighter and my joy deeper.

We were not created to strive for fruit, but to abide in the Vine. A funny thing happened to my prayer life. As I focused on worship, God moved in the lives of those I loved. Prayer, I learned, is not a matter of telling God what to do, or making needs known. He already knows everything. Prayer is enjoying the Presence of our King and letting Him lay His burdens on us, praying them back, weeping or rejoicing with our King.

I think I need to stop writing and just go do this.....

Day 54

Song of Songs 8:13

Groom: O you who dwell in the gardens with companions listening for your voice, let me hear it.”

It is a mystery that the God who created all the galaxies, who put the stars in place and knows them by name, would want to hear my voice. But, as incredible as that may seem, it is the truth. He, who gave us a mouth, speech, a heart, a mind, and a spirit, wants to interact with us. He is not religious and doesn't want meaningless repetitions. He longs to give us the wisdom we need as we walk through life:

“Wisdom has built her house, she has carved out her seven pillars. She has prepared her meat. She has mixed her wine. She has set her table. She has sent out her servant girls. She calls from the highest places in the city, ‘Whoever is gullible, turn in here.’ She says to the person without sense. ‘Come eat my bread. Stop being gullible and live, start traveling the road to understanding.” (Proverbs 9:1-6)

“If any of you needs wisdom, to know what you should do, you should ask God, and he will give it to you. God is generous to everyone,, and doesn’t find fault with them.” (James 1:5)

He longs to hear us, not telling Him what to do, but asking what He wants us to do.

I can remember so many, many hours of grocery shopping prayer meetings, where we would enjoy chatting with each other, and then close our eyes and tell God our needs, as if He only appeared when we closed our eyes. How grateful I am to my Korean friends that showed me a better way. They showed me how to enter His Presence with worship, just spending time with Him. They created an atmosphere where we could hear Him and not each other, and we could pray about the things on His heart.

Then, most unexpectedly He would begin to pray about the deep things in my heart. I say, He would pray, because often I did not know specifically what I was praying about, just a deep burden to cry, and then later, someone I had deeply loved would call me and tell me the changes that had taken place in her life. This is prayer at an intimate level where God shows up.

He changes us. He changes everything about prayer. When sharing these truths with a Turkish friend, she wanted to know why God needed us to worship Him. Immediately an embarrassing life experience came to mind that I shared with her. Once, about a week after my second child was born, our church called us and the Pastor interviewed us on the phone. Now, being in Turkey, where technology had not advanced that far yet, it appeared to be just a phone call, but for the congregation, while the Pastor talked with me a couple thousand people were listening in. I bubbled over telling him how smooth the delivery of my son came, and then he, realizing I wasn't getting the picture, said, "Devri, what would you say to Elmbrook, for we are all listening."

In the same way it is hard for us to picture whom we are speaking with when we pray this side of heaven, but God is worthy to be praised, and all those around His throne are doing it 24/7! Therefore, we join our voices with theirs and worship and as we do He draws near to us.

To dwell, or live, in His gardens is to be at work in the Vineyard. When we are new in our walk this is easier than after many battles, disappointments and defeats. But the Bride that has learned she is loved, and that her voice matters, remains in the garden through all the seasons of her life.

We only have today to enter in. "This is the day the LORD has made." Psalm 118:24 Let's worship Him now while we have the chance and let's not let the enemy silence our voices. He knows the Father loves us. He knows that the Father has chosen to work on the earth

through us. He knows who we are and so he attacks our identity and tries to silence us with discouragement, bitterness, and despair.

Beware of his ways and choose to please God by lifting your voice with praise and thanksgiving. Let's give Him our worship now, it means so much to Him that we do this before we see Him face to face. We will be shocked by the reward it brings!

Day 55

Song of Songs 8:14

(Bride) "Come away quickly, my Beloved. Run like a gazelle or a young stag on the mountain of spices." Amazing transformation! The bride is no longer being coaxed to go to the heights, she is calling Him to go! She has grasped the fact that God does His work on earth through His people. He draws close in our worship, prays through our words, and reaches out to others through our hearts and hands. He sends us across the street or across the ocean to carry His Presence into the darkness.

And here the Bride is "riding the wave" with Him. She is no longer trapped by fear, fear of loss, failure, or emptiness. His perfect love has filled her and set her free to live a life of love and peace. She takes risks with Him, for Him, through Him, and finds Him faithful...She has lost all fear of man, and loves Him openly, no longer self-conscious in worship she throws back her head and lifts her arms and dances with her Groom. Nothing excites her like true worship, or hearing the exploits of His people as they believe His Word and

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steps out to love others through prayer and sacrificial acts of service. He, like a gazelle, runs over the earth through His body here and brings life and love wherever He goes.

As I read the Song of Songs and write this I am only so sad over the times I failed to love like He does. Those were the times my focus was off of Him and on others, or worse yet, on myself. The life of grace comes from one source only, Jesus Christ, our Bridegroom King, the Living Word, the Savior and Rescuer.

Everyone of His words are true and hold the power to change us from the guilt ridden shame covered people we start out as, to the God-focused mature believers, driven by love and focused on His vineyard.

Lord, use these words and meditations to remind my dear children that You are who you say You are everyday of their lives. Use this to fill their sails with the wind of Your love and goodness. Empower them to run with You on the mountains of spices, fragrant with Your Presence and their self-sacrifice. Let your love flow in them and through them so they will be passionately tied to you throughout every trial and disappointment the enemy throws at them. And may we gather around your throne with eyes shining at Your entrance,

Jesus,
King,
Master,
Lord and Groom.

See Devri's 18 part video teaching on the Song of Songs on [You Tube](#) at "His Bride Production." devriw@gmail.com

