

Part 2: Love's Wonderful Wait

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September 15, 2024

Sigmund Freud isn't known for his coffee mug philosophy—but he certainly wasn't making any Pinterest boards when he described love as the "prototype of psychoses."

Plato once said, "The madness of love is the greatest of heaven's blessings." One modern psychologist said, "Love makes people do crazy things. And not feeling love can bring people to the edge of madness."

In more simple language, the band Nazareth reminds us, "Love hurts, love scars, love wounds and marks... ooh, ooh, love hurts."

Today, we read of another song lyric, one from the Song of Songs, where our leading lover sings to her listeners, "Sustain me with raisins; refresh me with apples, for I am sick with love...I adjure you, that you do not stir up or awaken love until it pleases."

There is a sort of madness involved in love. The world can't really explain it. But the Bible can, and that's why we are studying this book of love songs, the Song of Songs. Our passage this morning captures both the weight and the wonder of love in a way that both cautions us of its dangers while also calling us into its delights when it is appropriate.

If we seemed destined to be tortured lovers, then let us be wise enough to find relief in God's word. The big idea we will see for all of us is this: **Love is a wonderful and weighty responsibility.** We will unpack this in three movements: **Love's Captivating Power**, **Love's Appropriate Pull**, and **Love's Compelling Community.**

Our passage today is a series of poems, all of which are connected with a theme of yearning and anticipation. Last week we saw our lovers together on a lunch date, but our first poem opens with a flirtatious exchange while they are at a greater distance from each other.

This exchange highlights our first point this morning: **Love's Captivating Power.**

In **Song of Songs 1:12-17**, she sings, "While the king was on his couch, my nard gave forth its fragrance. My beloved is to me a sachet of myrrh that lies between my breasts. My beloved is to me a cluster of henna blossoms in the vineyards of Engedi." He sings, "Behold, you are beautiful my love; behold, you are beautiful; your eyes are doves." She responds, "Behold, you are beautiful my beloved, truly delightful. Our couch is green; the beams of our house are cedar; our rafters are pine."

Being, by nature, a cheap and cantankerous old soul, I resisted texting for the longest time. All of that finally changed when Sarah and I started dating. At the time she lived in Alberton and would lose cell service whenever she went home so we both developed a pattern of texting. She found if she inverted her phone on the top of her brother's dart board, and if the wind was just right, we could sent and receive texts for that brief moment.

The passage we just read, is almost like discovering ancient text messages just like that in the desert sand.

He is off and away, probably on a business trip and yet they are connected to each other by these intense scents.

When Sarah and I were visiting our missionaries in the Middle East we noticed how popular perfumeries were. Every mall, every corner, every booth had these unique types of wood or plants that when burned or pressed produce perfume. The desert ecosystem of the Middle East is naturally rich with these plants—one of which was nard.

Perhaps as a token of affection she gave him some of her perfume, and he gave her some of his. While he was on his trip—he was reminded of her by her scent. And at the same time, almost like in the movies, she is on her bed clutching a little pillow that smells like him.

His scent reminds her of the vineyards of Engedi. You can go visit the Oasis of Engedi today, just west of the Dead Sea. In the midst of an otherwise barren land, here is a canyon in the rock, replete with picturesque waterfall, clear springs, rich plant life and cool shade.

Even though they aren't together, and even though she's probably alone staring into the distance—he is her oasis. And she is lead into a daydream about their future.

Song 1:16-17, "Behold, you are beautiful, my beloved, truly delightful. Our couch is green; the beams of our house are cedar; our rafters are pine."

She's envisioning not *his* couch, or *her* couch, but *their* couch. She's planning their life together after the wedding. The couch, or bed, was green. The color reflects not only the oasis but the fertile hope of children. She's imagining the beams of the house they will build around their family and life together. All she wants is to settle down with him.

In our modern society, this woman might be seen as a threat to feminism as we know it. Now, we know two truths. Truth #1: God is sovereign over the womb, he opens it and he closes it and a woman's value is not based off of how many kids she has. Truth #2: Both men and women are capable of idolizing accomplishments outside the home, and both men and woman are capable of idolizing accomplishments inside the home.

While there are always individual considerations, this passage presents some ideals of relationships that are often excused or erased today. Without making any statement on the value of education, ladies, it's ok to want to be a wife and a mom. That's not a dirty desire. It's not settling. God has designed marriage and family building to be an expression of the *imago dei*. Before they were to subdue the earth, Adam and Eve were called to fill it. And even though the husband was built for the field--men, you should not think that you get a pass here. It's not that women are the family people and men get to go do fun things in the workplace. You are called to both things--you are responsible for work in the field and work in the family.

Bring back the daydreams of love that stretches beyond nights of brief intensity. If you're dating someone who doesn't cause you to think about anything beyond the bedroom—something is wrong. Maserati's go fast, but minivans go further. Buy a minivan.

After dreaming of their future, they begin to cutely complement each other: She says in **Song 2:1**, "I am a rose of Sharon, a lily of the valleys."

But he playfully responds, **Song 2:2-3** "As a lily among brambles, so is my love among the young women." To which she says, "As an apple tree among the trees of the forest, so is my beloved among the young men."

She says, "I'm noting more than a common flower." He says, "if you're a common flower--everyone else is a thorn. She says, "If men are trees, you're the only one with lovely fruit and shade. You can almost hear the song in the background, "And I only have eyes for you."

It's beyond reality and certainly beyond the limits of poetry to assume that these two were objectively the most beautiful people in the world. But that's the whole point. Love is meant to draw into deeper beauty, beauty beyond what is seen on the outside.

Relationships that remain superficial wither in the sun and dry out in the distance. Whether it's romantically, between brothers and sisters in the church, or with Jesus himself—love should move us. It should cause us to want to know and live in deeper union because love grows.

Because of this, I want to talk for a moment to young adults and kids. Friendship is a kind of love. We should want to know our friends more! But just because you like your friend, it doesn't mean you have to "like, like" them. While friendship can turn into that—friendship is good on its own! While all crushes are our friends, not all our friends are our crushes.

C.S. Lewis says that anyone who thinks friendship must equal romantic love, "betray[s] the fact they have never had a friend."

But these two, are ready and have agreed to be more than friends. And while that's never necessary, sometimes it's natural. And here we see how friendship changes in a weighty and wonderful way as our lady turns to us and sings: **Song of Song 2:4-7**, "He brought me to the banqueting house, and his banner over me was love. Sustain me with raisins; refresh me with apples, for I am sick with love. His left hand is under my head and his right hand embraces me! I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, by the gazelles or the does of the field that you do not stir up or awaken love until it pleases."

And here we see our second point this morning: **Love's Appropriate Pull**.

Here she begins to open up her dreams to us—she's envisioning his nearness, the wedding night, the house of feasting, the banner of love that would be flown over the honeymoon suite. She concludes with an image of the two of them as if they are the cover of a western romance novel: "His left hand is under my head, and his right hand embraces me."

Her desire for him is described as a runaway train. And I want to say, this desire itself is not bad! But what we do with that desire is important. Here, as her mind is running hot, she asks her friends to throw some cold water on her: "sustain me with raisins, refresh me with apples."

We are going to come back to the rest of what she says to her ladies, but as soon as she seems to slow down...here comes lover boy!

Whether in metaphor, or in person, her fiancé is coming back, and he's coming in hot like Superman: **Song of Songs 2:8-14**, "The voice of my beloved! Behold he comes, leaping over the mountains, bounding over the hills. My beloved is like a gazelle or a young stag. Behold, there he stands behind our wall, gazing through the windows, looking through the lattice. My beloved speaks and says to me: Arise, my love, my beautiful one, and come away for behold, the winter is past; the rain is over and gone. The flowers appear on the earth, the time of singing has come, the voice of the turtledove is heard in our land. The fig tree ripens its figs, and the vines are in blossom; they give forth fragrance. Arise, arise my love, my beautiful one, and come away. O my dove in the clefts of the rock, in the crannies of the cliff, let me see your face, let me hear your voice for your voice is sweet, and your face is lovely."

One commentator said of this text: "Apart from making most men feel inadequate because we have never uttered anything so romantic in our whole lives, what is going on here?"

That's a true observation and a good question.

Well, as the beloved returns he encounters his lover nestled back in her home. He compares her to a dove in the cleft of the rock. Doves don't have much protection except their ability to shelter in their rock homes. So he channels his inner John Cusack and holds up the boombox to her bedroom window to call her out.

And he does so by singing about sports. It's an age old problem. Beginning in verse 11, the man quotes a famous baseball announcer named Ernie Harwell. For nearly four decades, before the first Detroit Tigers spring training game he would say, "Lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone, the flowers appear on the earth, the time of the singing birds is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land."

Harwell's use of this passage helps us understand the context. Spring training was the indication that baseball season was just about to happen. It wasn't the regular season, but it meant the time for preparation had come.

So too, our lover says, "The wedding is almost here. The season for love has arrived. Come, come away with me."

Notice here how the Song doesn't teach sexual repression. In preparation for the wedding the desire for intimacy wasn't an awkward elephant in the corner. But instead it was placed in the proper context. Let's prepare for the time, but let's also beware of our current time.

Behind his language of flowers and blooms, we can put together what he's thinking of. But notice the only action items he presents: "Let me see your face, let me hear your voice, for your voice is sweet and your face is lovely."

His thoughts and their conversations are excited but not explicit. They know the pull, and they are embracing what is good about it, but trying to be wise about what is still to come. The problem in the opening poem was the geographic distance between them, but now that they are together the problem is the calendar difference between them and the wedding day.

But notice how they don't have to wrestle in secret with these desires. The excitement they have is expected, but so is the help of the community.

But this is our third point this morning: **Love's Compelling Community.**

The song closes this way, **Song of Songs 2:15-17**, "Catch the foxes for us, the little foxes that spoil the vineyards, for our vineyards are in blossom. My beloved is mine, and I am his; he grazes among the lilies. Until the day breathes and the shadows flee, turn, my beloved, be like a gazelle or a young stag on a cleft mountain.

The Song of Songs shows us that romantic love is like a burning fire, but the love of both the couple and the Christian community around them is the fireplace that keeps it from burning down the house.

Here, he's excited about what's to come—the season is at hand, but she said, "You're so right...but not yet. Turn away, my beloved, as you bound here, bound away until the shadows are gone. It might be spring, but it's not yet sunrise."

The Song of Songs upholds the wonderful dynamics of complementary gender roles. It is the banner of the husband's love which will cover her and her house. But while he has the banner, she has the brakes.

There are times where one person needs to be stronger than the other to say, "Not yet." But notice how this isn't the only barrier. When he came to her, he's described in verse 9 as standing behind "their" wall. They aren't waiting for someone else to say, "enough!" They are seeking to practice selfless love in the bedroom by together building selfless barriers before marriage. They are helping each other with their weighty desire of weighting.

But it's not just these two involved in the process. There are three commands in this song: "Sustain me with raisins, refresh me with apples for I am sick with love," and "Catch the foxes for us, the little foxes that spoil the vineyard for our blossoms are in bloom." These are all plural verbs so they are best understood as being spoken to the community around them. For love sick, and love ready couples, they need the help of their brothers and sisters.

We should help these couples not only make it to the wedding in one piece, but we should be helping them prepare for their new lives in marriage.

As a church with a thriving campus ministry—you better have loud doorbells. Because my guess is that there will be nights where you get a ring or a phone call from a young lover who says, "Hey, can I come crash on your couch--I don't trust myself." Or maybe a couple invites themselves over for a game night because they want to be reminded of the broader relational refreshment God gives to the church. Like parents on a road trip, we better have a console full of fruit snacks until we get to where we are going.

If you're not yet married I would encourage you to humble yourself and ask for help in this area. The church loves to love lovers. And church, I ask that you be ready to inconvenience yourself to help with causal distraction and relief.

But we don't just give them snacks for the road, we help them for when they arrive. That's why they are called to help them catch the foxes. You can't see the foxes, but their holes ruin the vineyard. We need the help of each other to prepare for marriage by inviting and providing godly counsel for life in the vineyard.

I once heard of a young pastor who was talking to an older brother about what age he'll grow out of wrestling with lust. The old man responded, "I don't know, but it's not at my age." Not only in areas of intimacy, but in financial advice, spiritual disciplines, parenting and so much more—we are to hop into the yard with them, grab a mallet and start knocking some foxes around.

We are to help each other, but our lady-lover also gives a caution to us as individuals: **Song of Song 2:15**, "I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, by the gazelles or the does of the field, that you not stir up or awaken love until it pleases."

Notice here how the weight of love, not the rawness of sex, is what is spoken to here. If you wait until your teenager is going 85 MPH down the interstate before you talk to him about driving, it won't go well. And if we follow the world's advice of talking about sex before we talk about love, we are destined to the same end.

Love, not sex is the end. Which is why waiting for one is no threat to the other. While commendations to waiting may stir up in you some fear of "purity culture," or another loveless experience, notice how pleasure is actually the goal!

We are to do this when it pleases. Pleasure is behind even patience. That's why the singer appeals by the gazelles and the does, those words are used because they intentionally rhyme with two common names for God in Hebrew. Because we have the pleasure of God, we seek further pleasures as God dictates.

He made them! He knows what is most pleasurable even if, just like Adam and Eve felt in the garden, if feels like he's holding out.

This is not sexual repression, it is sexual responsibility. The words translated, "stir up" and "awaken," are actually the same Hebrew word used twice for emphasis. It's not saying, "don't feel a desire for love." It's not saying, "repress all emotions." The words used imply an intentional speeding up. It's saying, you might have a nice fire, but don't seek to stoke it higher.

Because love's pull and love's power is so intense—it pays to be patient with it. What does this look like?

I'll conclude with four quick points of application.

First, **Open Your Mouth**. Instead of dark thoughts, have open conversations. Kids specifically, if you are wrestling with your feelings in this way—don't keep it a secret. Talk to your parents, talk to one of your teachers here at church or any of the elders.

Second, **Guard Your Heart**. Young adults, be careful of the content you consume. We can justify watching lots of movies and listening to lots of content because it's not openly pornographic but much of our comedies and media are attempting to slowly make us comfortable with thoughts, ideas and passions that should only be normative in marriage.

Now, some of us have awakened love. We feel the sickness in unique ways because we've tasted aspects of love and sex in very real and intimate ways. For some it has come through pre-marital sex or pornography. For some, it's because you have been sinned against, molested, abused or raped. It was awakened, but not at your choice. There are also widows and widowers, who had tasted the sweetness

of love and the pain of divorce or death. Maybe there are some in here who struggle with same-sex attraction and they fear that a life of celibacy is a life of only torture and teasing.

This is why we must learn to **See the Church**. The church isn't perfect, the church is capable of saying dumb things for the right reasons—but the world offers dangerous things for the wrong reasons. For those wrestling with intimacy the church should be the most satisfying of all human spaces. Here we can love one another really and truly. It's not a marriage, and it's not heaven. But it's a community of saints who remind each other of who our perfect spouse is, and where our perfect home is. This church should be a two way street of both sharing our burdens and also seeing the burdens of others.

This leads us to our last point of application: **Wake to Christ**.

The Song cautions us of emotions which we ought not to stir until ready, but the Paul picks up the same language in Ephesians and says this: **Ephesians 5:14**, "For anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says, 'Awake o sleeper and rise from the dead and Christ will shine on you.'"

Paul is here writing to those who are burdened with sin, guilty in mind, and sorrowful in soul and he says—"If that's you, wake up, stir yourself up from the dead and Christ will shine on you."

If you want to know what love is like, if you want to practice being a good lover, then learn to love Christ. Learn to drink richly from his present love by faith in him. Find how he alone satisfies us with his love by cleansing us on the cross. We day dream of what it would be like to know our lover more—but do you have such a single minded devotion to know Christ in that way?

Affection is not opposed to effort. Just because I have affection for my wife doesn't mean I don't put effort into my pursuit of her for my joy and for hers. But it's only here where we know our effort will not be wasted! Christ will shine on us when we bring to him our sin and our need for satisfaction.

In the book of Hosea, God uses the theme of marriage and intimacy to show how the idolatry of our hearts is the same as adultery towards him as our true lover. Despite our unfaithfulness, God promises to never give up on us through Jesus. And notice the language of garden refreshment that the Song portrayed, but here applied to what God will do for us in bringing us back to himself: **Hosea 14:5-7**, "I will be like the dew to Israel; he shall blossom like the lily; he shall take root like the trees of Lebanon; his shoots shall spread out; his beauty shall be like the olive, his fragrance like Lebanon. They shall return and dwell beneath my shadow, they shall flourish like the grain; they shall blossom like the vine; their frame shall be like the wine of Lebanon."

Brothers and sisters, you might never have a groom bound over a hill for you, but Jesus has come from heaven and earth for you. You might never find the shade of a human husband, but Christ has come to be our shadowy refuge amidst the sun of a broken world. You may feel common, crushed and ugly, but his love will cause you to blossom like the lily.

One day, the distance between him and us will not only be spiritually removed, but physically removed. But right now—just like our lovers—there is a sense of separation. But in the meantime, his Spirit is with us, his community is around us, and we've got foxes to catch. We've got souls to save, sins to kill, and praise to give. So let us enjoy the wonder and responsibility of that love until the day breaks and the shadows flee.