

Part 7: Love's Durable Delight

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Cultural commentators and psychologists have spilled many hours and countless words attempting to define the cultural effect one modern television program is producing. In specific, it has caused a great deal of despair, anxiety and hopelessness.

One reporter described the protagonist in this way: "He's funny. He's creative. He is heaven to [those in the show]," but, "in the eyes of many [who watch] he is hell."

The character's name is Bandit, and he is the father of the show's namesake, "Bluey." If you're unfamiliar with the children's show—imagine if Happy Days and Seinfeld made a cartoon following a the simple and ordinary life of a family of blue heeler dogs. That's the show. Four dogs, a mom, a dad, and two siblings, being dogs. Its simplicity is captivating and condemning.

Most shows present absentee parents, stupid dads, wayward moms, and lifeless rules. But "Bluey" presents loving parents, playful chores, and meaningful relationships. One commentator described the effect as, "a toxic fascination," where despite our inadequacies we gather to watch, "the best of the best."

The show is terrifying not because it presents something foreign—but instead it features what is so, remarkably, ordinary.

Joe Brumm, the creator, worked with child psychologists and observed in children the magic ordinary of play. They discovered that play thrived best not the fantastic far away worlds but in the ordinary, and yet somehow magical, simplicity of a family.

It is a living illustration of the "K.I.S.S." principle: when it comes to play—keep it simple, stupid. As we've been working through the Song of Song's we have seen a similar concept with love.

We live in a world which has felt the lack of love and the cultural response has been fantastic: explicit podcasts, prevalent pornography, self-help books, adult-only retreat centers, diets designed to boost your sex life, apps as a marketplace for practice and so much more. And yet, what we see in Song of Songs is the same principle: when it comes to romantic love, "keep it simple, stupid."

Culture tries to tell us that our kids are longing for the fantasy of Marvel to make their imaginations come alive—but our hearts long for the simplicity of bluey. So, too, the greatest context for romance, love and intimacy is the simplicity of biblical marriage between a man and a woman.

This is our main point today: **Biblical love is durable, delightful, and dynamic.**

We will see three aspects of this today. First we will see **Durable Restoration**, then **Delightful Reunion** and lastly **Dynamic Horizons**.

While the book of Song of Songs is a book on love in biblical proportions—we've also seen that it is not a fantasy. It's not a story of an impossible love—but the story of a deeply human love lived according to God's ideals.

This book has outlined the dating, the marriage, and last week—the first tension in the lives of our two lovers. In different ways, each felt unloved and lost—and yet our passage last week concluded with a song of hope. Our lady knew that their love would bring them back together again.

In a world where love's brokenness seems more visible than its beauty—it would be wise of us to ask the question: "But would it?" Would their love bring them back?

Well, today we get that answer. The spurned lover himself steps up to the mic and he affirms the wonderful hope that when two sinners love God and love one another—there's always hope for restoration.

This is our first point this morning: **Durable Restoration.**

He opens up to her confidence with this answer, **Song of Songs 6:4**, "You are beautiful as Tirzah, my love, lovely as Jerusalem, awesome as an army with banners."

He opens up and affirms two realities that only a husband can know: "My wife is the most beautiful woman in the world. My wife is also the most terrifying military force in the world."

It's an odd paradox that the person who we love most is also the person we fear the most. That's part of love's vulnerability we've spent so much time talking about. Our attraction to them causes us to fear their displeasure.

I think this is God's kind design to help us understand what the fear of the Lord is meant to produce in us. To the unrepentant sinner, you should stand in a unique fear that God is the judge who will justly condemn you according to your sin. But for the believer, we are able to see God not only as a judge—but as a lover. Jesus, his only son, has removed our sin by faith.

So now we have this unique tension where we know that we have sinned, and yet we can have confidence to approach God and experience his love because Jesus has made restoration possible. He has dealt with our sin on the cross—and now we come with humble confidence back to God.

It's this experience every Christian has with the Father through the Son that shapes the experience others have with us when they have hurt us. Our sin against God was far more than their sin against us. But because God has forgiven us in Jesus, and welcomes us home with confidence—we too can not only forgive those who sin against us but we can also provide them the same sort of confidence.

Notice how he does this beginning in verse 5 as he describes her physical appearance. In verse 8 he continues, **Song 6:8-10** "There are sixty queens and eighty concubines and virgins without number. My dove, my perfect one, is the only one, the only one of her mother. Pure to her who bore her. The young women saw her and called her blessed; the queens and concubines also, and they praised her. 'Who is this who looks down like the dawn, beautiful as the moon, bright as the sun, awesome as an army with banners?'"

Here is his wife who gave him the cold shoulder the night before—but notice the confidence he gives to her, and the vulnerability he exposes himself to.

To a wife who wonders if he'd take her back he says, "You're the only one! I don't want a perfect life with any other woman—I want this real life with you." He gives her the confidence of his love—and instead he is the one who shows himself vulnerable!

Notice his language in **verse 9**, "My dove, my perfect one is the only one..." The only other time he uses those titles are back when he was turned down in **Song 5:2**, "Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my perfect one..."

Here's why this is significant. If we are honest, we know how to be master manipulators when people sin against us—and unfortunately this is most true when the other person has come back to apologize! It's so easy to exert our power over them by accepting their apology—but while also chastising their audacity to sin against us in such a way or by withdrawing our affection and sulking. Both of these are power moves to say, "You better be careful—or I'll stop loving you."

But he takes on the vulnerability here! He shows how eager he is to accept her because he takes on the risk of being turned down again. In his mind, he withholds nothing—he's ready to be hurt again not because he's a fool—but because he knows the offer of true restoration.

She explains how his vulnerable reaffirmation affects her when she uses this illustration in **Song of Songs 6:11-13**, "I went down to the nut orchard to look at the blossoms of the valley, to see whether the vines had budded, whether the pomegranates were in bloom. Before I was aware, my desire set me among the chariots of my fellow kinsman, a price. Return, return, O Shulamite, return, return that we may look upon you."

What's she saying here? She's describing the way she cautiously checked the temperature of the water as she returned. Just as you dip your toe in the lake or river to see if it's too cold or not, she went to the garden to see if the fruit of affection was still growing. But as she checked, almost as soon as her toe hit the water, her heart was warmed and reminded of the immense love she had for him and that he had for her.

And as they returned to each other the voice of the community joins again in encouragement: "Return, return, return that we may look upon you." Restoration is often a community project—and the church should offer their wise support to those who need it.

Only biblical love allows someone to lay down their own rights and love others in a selfless way. Because Jesus laid down his rights to love us, we are so loved that we don't need to manipulate others to get it. As Paul tells us, **1 Corinthians 13:4-7**, "Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things."

If romantic love is fixated on getting its own way—it will never be satisfied. It will only have itself. God alone is perfect enough for self-love. To love one's self ultimately is to dump all of our resources into a bottomless pit. But because Jesus shows us true love is satisfied in him—we can also realize that romantic love, and all relational love—is most satisfied in the love of others over the love of self.

This transforms the way we interact with others when they sin against. We can give confidence of restoration—because God gives returning sinners confidence in his love. That’s why we practice corporate confession and follow it up with an assurance of pardon. God’s acceptance of us by faith, and the confidence we have—always shapes the way we respond to those who sin against us.

And when we provide that assurance of pardon—the possibility intimacy is restored.

What this looks like varies according to the nature of sin and the wisdom required. But here, the relational weight of restoration, and the safety of affection, leads to the joy of physical restoration.

As the community celebrates their return to one another, the man says to the audience, **Song 6:13**, "Why should you look upon the Shulamite, as upon a dance before two armies." In other words, the war is over, the dancers will now celebrate...and you can go away. He pulls the blinds of their house as we see our next point this morning: **Delightful Reunion**.

The garden celebrated in chapter four became the garden lost in chapter 5. But here is the garden restored in chapter 7. He describes her intimate beauty, he calls her to join him back in the garden and she accepts the invitation in **Song 7:9b-10**, "It goes down smoothly for my beloved, gliding over lips and teeth. I am my beloved and his desire is for me."

I want to make two quick points here. First, ***Sex is an expression of unity***.

Notice how the two didn't hop into bed and then say, "Now we are good." Their physical reunion didn't create the relational restoration. In fact the opposite was true. The relational restoration they enjoyed drew them into a renewed desire for physical reunion. We touched on this last week, but it's worth saying again, sex is not making love. Sex doesn't create something that otherwise didn't exist—sex is the celebration of the love that already existed.

Notice also how neither used sex as a weapon or as leverage. She didn't offer sex in order to placate his wrath—he didn't withhold sex in order to make her feel what he felt.

Sex is not a tool to get what we want. Sex is the expression of who we want. That’s why we can acknowledge that intimacy can be restored without sex being regained. There are times where trust has been so violated in a marriage where it takes more than a handful of verses being read before that physical restoration happens.

But here is where we can see the hope inside of such wisdom—sex is a seal of unity not the source of it. Sex is real—and it really does something. Paul says in 1 Corinthians that sex actually joins our bodies to the one who we sleep with. That spiritual reality is also a physical reality. Scientists can track distinct hormones in both men and women during intimacy which create in the brain a bonding effect.

Because that effect is real—we want to make sure the unity it seals is real. Cheap sex in search of love is like sealing up an empty water bottle and handing it to a thirsty person. We don't manipulate the physical in order to discover the relational. Instead—we find deep relational unity outside the bedroom, which then seals up the fine wine of intimacy inside the bedroom. Marital sex is an expression of unity.

Second, ***Sex is an expression of redemption***.

All the relational pain we have in singleness and in marriage stems all the way back to the first marriage. When Adam and Eve threw off God's design for them sin entered the world and they were cursed. This sin, which they thought would bring them relational union, actually brought relational discord.

Look how God put this in **Genesis 3:16**, "To the woman he said, I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children. Your desire shall be contrary to your husband, but he shall rule over you."

What does this mean? It means that sin complicates and frustrates our relationship with others. The husband was designed to be the leader, but he will be prone to abuse it with either force or passivity. And here, the woman whose design and desire was to help and serve others—she will be prone to help and serve herself.

That word, "desire," in Genesis 3:16 is a unique word which only shows up one other time in the Bible. That time? **Song 7:10**, when the wife says, "I am my beloved's and his desire is for me."

You see, the love and intimacy of marriage, the restoration and celebration of sexual union is a living illustration of the way in which sin itself is defeated. It shows us that there is a relationship which not only restores us—but redeems us. There is a relationship which changes not only our words—but our hearts. It reorders our broken affections. Sex reminds married couples of what all Christians need to understand: giving ourselves to the glory of another is our greatest joy.

We would never doubt the personal joy of sex in our world. But this is meant to remind us of the personal joy we have in being restored to and giving our lives to Jesus for all eternity.

And this fleeting moment between a husband and a wife in the bedroom is meant to remind us of the eternal passion afforded to us when we are won to Jesus. If Bluey makes Marvel look like child's play—then what we have with Jesus for all eternity—makes the most beautiful moments of intimacy with our spouse between the sheets look like black and white TV.

That's why sex cannot be the center of your relationship with God—and neither can it be the center of your relationship with your spouse! Sex shows us we need an intimacy greater than a moment.

This is our last point this morning: **Dynamic Horizons**. Far beyond that one moment, her imagination extends both into the future, and into the past—intimacy is dynamic stretching everywhere.

Notice her future hope in **Song 7:11-13**, "Come, my beloved, let us go into the fields and lodge in the villages; let us go out early to the vineyards and see whether the vines have budded, whether the grape blossoms have opened and the pomegranates are in bloom. There I will give you my love. The mandrakes give forth fragrance, and beside our doors are choice fruits new as well as old, which I have laid up for you, O my beloved."

Marriage has ups and downs, but it's not a roller coaster. I'm certain that there are some in her whom might think that way. Imagine if you were stuck on a roller coaster. The first time around it would be great. Maybe even the first few laps would be amazing. But soon the joy would wear off and the sickening feeling would begin to take over. Is this it? The same thing over and over again?

But notice how this passage ends in **8:5**, "Who is that coming up from the wilderness, leaning on her beloved." This love is going somewhere. It's not a carnival ride designed for brief stints of joy--it's a road that, Lord willing, leads to you walking faithfully with your spouse even as you age and lean on one another for support.

Isn't it funny that our world often finds the idea of sleeping with one person for the rest of your life to be a dreadful reality? But notice how this woman longs to bring out some old stuff, but it's not seen as a bad thing.

Can you imagine if every time you went to a doctor—it was a new doctor? If every time you went to a mechanic—it was a new mechanic. If every time you talked to a pastor—it was a new pastor? In every other area of life we know that there is something profoundly satisfying and helpful about having someone know our body and our person. But for some reason—we think differently about sex. But those old fruits—those are good fruits.

Yet, notice how she says there are also new fruits. I heard a pastor who was asked by a young man why he could choose to be married. The man was baffled at the idea that he would bind himself to one sexual partner till one of them died. The pastor responded and said, "I've never had sex with the same woman once. And every one of them was my wife" The man looked as confused as you do now. He went on to say that the woman he was married to now isn't the same woman he married. She's matured, she's grown, she's changed, she's better known by him, better loved by him, and distinctly unique every time.

The future is bright, so bright that she begins to dream an impossible dream in **chapter 8**. She dreams that the two of them were brother and sister growing up. That they could have known each other for more years than they currently did. Not just years into the future. But years into the past.

She dreams of being able to kiss him. Culturally at this time, married couples never showed PDA in public—it was deemed improper. But brothers and sisters could kiss each other without issue because it wasn't seen as a romantic love. She dreams that they could have begun then, and loved one another ages before.

To prepare for this sermon series, my wife and I sat down with a couple in their 70s and 80s. I had them read the Song of Songs and said, "Talk to me about this book and its content in light of your stage in life." The conversation was profoundly encouraging to my wife and I. They talked about the way in which as their sex drives changed, intimacy changed with it. They are still deeply attracted to one another but they long to read books together, to practice hobbies together, to read the Bible together.

Their intimacy hasn't been lost, it's been liberated—it is dynamic. I mentioned Song 8:8 to her and said that her desire for him to be a brother to her was an impossible hypothetical. She paused and said, "You know what, he is my brother. I've gotten to see him grow up. I've been with him for decades—far longer than I've been with my brothers. I've lived that life with him."

That's what I want. The world wants quick fixes, and frantic moments. But what is best is what is most simple. The more we see the beauty of marriage as greater than the beauty of sex—the more all of our life makes better sense. And more importantly, the more the gospel makes sense.

It reminds me of how C.S. Lewis concluded *The Last Battle*: "Now at last they were beginning Chapter One of the Great Story which no one on earth has read: which goes on for ever: in which every chapter is better than the one before."

That's what she's saying isn't it. That's a pretty compelling hope. But C.S. Lewis wasn't writing this as an allegory of marriage. He was writing it as an allegory of walking with Jesus into glory. And God has written the story of marriage, so that we might believe that story.

If you can imagine this to be true in our relationship with a limited, and human spouse. Imagine the way in which this is true when we walk with an infinite and unlimited Jesus. Every day for us with Jesus is better. Every time we look at God's word we are as Matthew described, "kingdom scribes," "who brings out of his treasures what is old and what is new."

And when we get to glory, after we have given up our time, our love, and our priority to the service of our lover--we too will say: "If only I had loved him earlier. If only I had known him longer. If only I had enjoyed him sooner."

Well, let today be that day where you see not only the beauty of human love which carries us to death, but of God's divine love for you which carries us even beyond it.

Our walk with Jesus is durable, he always welcomes us home. Our walk with Jesus is dynamic, it takes us into new seasons with treasures old and new. Our walk with Jesus is delightful—it takes us into the presence of God in whose hands are pleasures forever more.