

# TODAY IN THE WORD

JUNE 2004

When I found  
the one my heart  
loves, I held him  
and would not let  
him go.

Song of Songs 3:4



SONG OF SONGS: THE WISDOM OF LOVE

# PASSIONATE LOVE

*I am my beloved's and his desire is for me.* — SONG OF SOLOMON

Do you know that you are desired? Do you feel completely and passionately loved? As believers, we often talk about the love of God, but rarely do we see it as a deeply felt consuming love. We reserve that type of love for romance. Instead, we tend to see God's love as something safe and warm, reserved for the calm confines of the church.



But, this spring, Mel Gibson's acclaimed movie *The Passion of the Christ*, broke through our safe view of Christ's love. As our hearts were broken by the sight of our suffering Savior, the movie reminded us again of just how much Jesus loves us.

Why did God's only Son suffer and die on the cross? He took on the burden of our sins because He loves us. Intensely.

God's love is not something we deserve. It is not a response to something we have done or earned—it is a gift. The apostle John writes, "This is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins" (1 John 4:10).

In their book *The Sacred Romance*, authors Brent Curtis and John Eldredge discuss how God's sacrificial passionate love resonates in our hearts at an intensely deep level. How wonderful to be loved like that! They write, "Someone has noticed, someone has taken the initiative. There is nothing we need to do to keep it up, because his love for us is not based on what we've done, but who we are." In his book *The Problem of Pain*, C. S. Lewis agrees: "It passes reason to explain why any creatures, not to say creatures such as we, should have a value so prodigious in their Creator's eye."

What an astounding, amazing type of Love!

This month we will study the Song of Solomon—a celebration of the love between a groom and his bride. Song of Solomon centers on the "beloved," and the word is repeated more than 32 times in the book. As we study the text, we cannot help but notice that this love between a man and a woman is also a striking representation of deep love of Christ for us.

In the text, Solomon writes of the connection that exists between himself and his bride. He extols her virtues and her beauty. The woman celebrates their bond: "I belong to my lover, and his desire is for me" (7:10).

The intimate relationship between Solomon and his bride is an accurate portrayal of Christ's love for us. Jesus loves us completely as no one else has ever done. His love is not based on how we look or act, or how we make Him feel. He loves us despite who we are. Even better, He loves us completely and thoroughly because we are His. This is a love worth cherishing.

As the hymnwriter so aptly expressed in *When I Survey the Wondrous Cross*, it is in viewing Christ's sacrifice that we will realize at last the depth of His love for the church and for us. It is this unsurpassed love that excites our deepest, most loyal response.

"See, from his head, his hands, his feet / sorrow and love flow mingled down. / Did e'er such love and sorrow meet, / or thorns compose so rich a crown. Were the whole realm of nature mine, / that were an offering far too small; / love so amazing, so divine, / demands my soul, my life, my all." ■

Stephen Stowell

# ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

## *Omniscience*

Does God know what kind of day you had yesterday? Does He know what kind of day you are having today? More importantly, does He know what kind of day you will have tomorrow? The answer to these questions relates to the divine attribute of omniscience.

To say that God is omniscient implies that He knows all that can be known: past, present, and future. In Isaiah 46:10 He declares, “I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say: My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please.”

God knows our thoughts before we think them, our words before we speak them, and our actions before we implement them (Ps. 139:1–4). He discerns the secret motives of our hearts (Ps. 139:23; Prov. 16:33).

The biblical truth that God is omniscient would have been especially comforting during Isaiah’s day, as the northern kingdom of Israel was carried into captivity by the Assyrians, and the people of Judah were warned that they would suffer a similar fate at the hands of the Babylonians. Divine omniscience meant that God’s purpose for them, based upon His comprehensive knowledge of their future, would be fulfilled.

### *Why Theology Matters*

*The fact that God knows all is amazing enough. But there is an even more amazing truth. The same God whose knowledge is so comprehensive that it encompasses past, present, and future, also knows you by name. Every minute detail of your life is clear to Him, even those things that are hidden from you. He hears when you pray, discerns the true motives behind the words, and knows just how to answer.*

*For Further Reading*  
To learn more about God’s omniscience and other divine attributes, read *Our Awesome God* by John MacArthur (Good News).



# MBI Today

NEWS OF PEOPLE AND EVENTS AT MOODY BIBLE INSTITUTE  
JUNE 2004

## Behind the Scenes at Proclaim!

By Lisa Ann Cockrel

# PROCLAIM!

A MINISTRY OF MOODY BIBLE INSTITUTE



*Margianne Alfonso  
works out with  
Joseph Stowell  
every morning . . .  
sort of.*

**M**argianne is a faithful listener to the *Proclaim!* radio program featuring the teaching of MBI's president Dr. Joseph Stowell and co-hosted by Wayne Shepherd. She recently wrote to let them know how much she enjoys their work. "I hear you at 5:30 am as I go to the gym. Because I don't want to miss your messages, I am a regular attendee at the gym. If it weren't for your program I would be tempted to skip working out!"

Margianne's enthusiasm for *Proclaim!* is echoed across the world where the program is heard by thousands of listeners through 446 different broadcast outlets and



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## Song of Songs: The Wisdom of Love

Wisdom and love don't seem to go hand in hand. In our understanding of the human makeup, most people view the mind and the heart as two distinct, often conflicting, centers of our being.

And an introductory reading of Song of Songs, or Song of Solomon as it's widely known, might appear to reinforce the notion that love is really more of an act of emotion than a product of reason. But we need to take a closer look at the theological wisdom written into the lines of this passionate love song.

Join us this month in *Today in the Word* as we learn what a human expression of love, through the inspired Word of God, can teach us about the divine passion our Lord has for us.

And please remember that *Today in the Word* is an expression of our love for you and our appreciation for all your support of the ministries of Moody Bible Institute. Your gifts of love are powerfully needed—thank you for your generosity!

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*The wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready.*

REVELATION 19:7



#### TODAY AT MOODY

Dr. Thomas Cornman, Vice President and Dean of Undergraduate School, invites you to praise God for the successful education ministry He has granted to MBI and to pray that the coming school year would continue to glorify Him.

*Read: Ephesians 5:22–33*

#### TODAY IN THE WORD



King Edward VIII of England shocked the world when he abdicated from the throne in order to marry the divorced American socialite Wallis Warfield Simpson. Some years later he gave marital advice to a group of his close friends about how to stay on good terms with one's spouse. "Of course, I do have a slight advantage over the rest of you," he admitted. "It does help in a pinch to be able to remind your bride that you gave up a throne for her."

Believers also have a vivid reminder of what it cost Jesus Christ to make the church His bride. He did not give up His throne forever, but He did lay aside the prerogatives of divinity and took upon Himself a human nature (Phil. 2:5–8). Being fully human and fully God, He submitted to a brutal death on the cross in order to purify the church and present it to Himself as a spotless bride (Titus 2:14).

In many ways, this is also the drama played out in the biblical book Song of Songs, also called the Song of Solomon. One of the most mysterious and controversial books of the Bible, its message has something to say about both human marriage and the divine love God has for His church.

Its frank description of the delights of human love has caused some people to wonder why it was included in the Bible. However, the Jewish writings

known as the *Mishnah* quote the second-century Jewish rabbi Aquiba as saying, "All the ages are not worth the day on which the Song of Songs was given to Israel; for all the Writings are holy, but the Song of Songs is the Holy of Holies."

God's people need not be embarrassed by the portrayal of human love found in this book, for it points to a higher love that can only come from God. Its description of the groom's passion for his bride is a reflection of Christ's deep love for the church. It is a love that will not be denied. It calls forth the best in those who are loved. Christ's love is stronger than our inconstancy, doubts, and fears. His love is stronger than death.

#### TODAY ALONG THE WAY



Do you know a couple who reflect the biblical picture of a loving relationship?

Ask them to tell you their story. How did they meet? What was it like to fall in love? What kinds of challenges have they had to overcome in order to keep their love for one another strong?

As you listen, take note of any parallels to Christ's love for the church. Ask God to use this month's study of the Song of Solomon to give you greater insight into Christ's love for you. Pray that He will use it to rekindle your own spiritual passion.

*Read: Song of Solomon 1:1-4*

## TODAY IN THE WORD



For several years, Tedd would propose to Jane on every Valentine's Day.

Each time she would reply, "Not yet." Tedd finished college, began his career, and still continued to propose. And Janet continued to refuse. Finally, Tedd reached the end of his patience and determined that this Valentine's Day would be the last. Janet would either agree to marry him or he would move on. As Tedd was about to propose for the last time, Janet told him that she had a gift for him. Curious, Ted unwrapped the package and looked inside to find a beautiful embroidery that Janet had made for him. It had a single word on it: "Yes."

The first few verses of the Song of Solomon express the same sentiment. The book opens with a description of the bride's longing for her lover. As she paints a portrait of the one she loves, she also draws back the veil on her own heart.

The effect of her lover's presence is intoxicating. His love is compared to wine. His name is like perfume. Her opening request is that the one she loves will kiss her with "the kisses of his mouth." Although it was not unusual for people to greet one another with a kiss in the ancient world, this was usually only a formality, something like what is often called an "air kiss" today. In the opening verses of this book, however, the bride asks for much more. She does not want a mere peck

on the cheek or friendly hug. She longs for an intimate sign of her lover's affection.

The bride also longs to be in her lover's presence. She invites the groom to take her away and bring her into his chambers.

Her plea reflects a common desire we all share. We may not all marry, but we all long for a love so powerful that it will "sweep us off our feet." Human love is important and a wonderful gift from God, but in the end it will still fail to meet our most secret longings. In the end, our ultimate "yes" must be reserved for God. It is His love alone that can satisfy our deepest desire.

This beautiful book mirrors many of our own experiences with human love, while reflecting the kind of love relationship that ought to exist between Christ and His church.

## TODAY ALONG THE WAY



Who are these two lovers in this book and why is their story recorded in Scripture? Interpreters have been divided in their opinion about whether this author (traditionally thought to be Solomon) was describing his own experience or writing allegorically about God's love for His people.

As you meditate today on God's love for you, does the bride's desire also reflect the desire of your heart? Do you long, more than anything else, for Christ to come and take you away with Him?

*Come,  
Lord Jesus!*

REVELATION 22:20



## TODAY AT MOODY

Today, please join us in praying for the staff of the Office of Academic Dean—Louise Addison, Larry Davidhizar, Paula Siebold, Billie Sue Thompson, and Cheryl Washington—who work together with Dr. Cornman for the cause of Christian education at Moody.

*Consider it  
pure joy,  
my brothers,  
whenever you  
face trials of  
many kinds.*

JAMES 1:2



#### TODAY AT MOODY

Today, please include  
in your prayers  
Timothy Ostrander,  
as he assists Dr.  
Stowell in many areas,  
as well as overseeing  
Conference Ministries  
and Church Ministries.

#### Read: Song of Solomon 1:5–8

#### TODAY IN THE WORD



In its July 1, 2003, issue, *Harper's Bazaar* asked supermodel Iman what aging meant to her. "Wisdom. Knowledge. And gravity! Working against you!" she replied. "Since I wasn't raised in the West, I don't have that deep-rooted fear of getting old. But age is more accepted here today. Women over 35, 40, 50, 60 are considered beautiful. It wasn't that way when I arrived. People were so worried about wrinkles, and I couldn't understand what this obsession with age was."

Is age the enemy of beauty? The answer depends upon what you understand beauty to be. Physical beauty, the writer of Proverbs warns, is fleeting (Prov. 31:30). Lasting beauty is reflected in character and wisdom. It is a matter of the "inner self" (1 Peter 3:4). True beauty is created when character and life experience meet. To paraphrase Iman, it is the result of the combination of wisdom, knowledge, and gravity. Not the force of gravity that causes our bodies to sag and our muscles to droop, but the gravity that comes from many years of applying faith to life's challenges.

We are like the bride in today's reading, who has been marked by the things she has suffered. Forced by her brothers to work in their vineyard, her skin was darkened by the sun. Yet these experiences have only contributed to her beauty.

Likewise, God uses suffering to enhance the beauty of Christ's bride. Suffering, according to the apostle Paul, can teach us to persist in our faith. Persisting in faith and obedience produces Christlike character within us (Rom. 5:3–5).

This is why James 1:2 tells us that we should consider it "pure joy" when we face trials. It is not because we enjoy trouble. No one enjoys suffering, not even Jesus (cf. Matt. 26:39). The joy that James describes springs from our knowledge of what such trials will produce.

By God's grace our difficult experiences will be transformed into wisdom, knowledge, and spiritual gravity. They will produce perseverance and character. They comprise the treatment God uses to enhance the spiritual beauty of the bride of Christ.

#### TODAY ALONG THE WAY



Think of a time when God helped you to face a trial with faith and obedience. How did the experience change you? Can you think of any specific dimensions of "spiritual beauty" that were added to your character as a result of your suffering?

As you face other trials, remind yourself that they have been sent your way as part of Christ's plan to "present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless" (Eph. 5:27).

*Read: Song of Solomon 1:9–14*

## TODAY IN THE WORD



Actress Elizabeth Taylor is known for her love of diamond jewelry. On one

occasion she was attending a social event where one of the guests pointed out the large diamond she was wearing. “That’s a bit vulgar,” the woman remarked. Taylor offered to let the woman try the ring on. As the woman gazed at the diamond on her own finger, Taylor commented, “There, it’s not so vulgar now, is it?”

Is it wrong for us to use cosmetics and jewelry to enhance our appearance? Christians disagree on this point. Several New Testament passages warn believers not to make outward appearance the primary focus of their beauty. In 1 Timothy 2:9–10, for example, the apostle Paul says that he wants women to “dress modestly, with decency and propriety, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or expensive clothes, but with good deeds, appropriate for women who profess to worship God.”

The apostle Peter makes a similar point, reminding his readers that the primary source of their beauty does not lie in expensive jewelry or fine clothing, but in character. This was how the holy women of the past made themselves beautiful (1 Peter 3:4–5).

The primary point in these passages is positive rather than negative. We can see that it’s appropriate to take steps to enhance our physical appearance—the groom in today’s

reading expresses his appreciation for the bride’s efforts to beautify herself. In particular, he mentions earrings of gold studded with silver and a necklace of fine jewelry. In her response, the bride adds perfume to the list of items.

But Scripture makes it clear that this kind of beauty has limits. Beauty that is based primarily on external appearances can be misleading. “Charm is deceptive,” the author of Proverbs warns, “and beauty is fleeting; but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised” (Prov. 31:30). Cosmetics and jewelry may add something to our appearance for a time, but in the end they cannot provide true beauty. Godly character is the only source of unfading beauty.

## TODAY ALONG THE WAY



It is clear from today’s passage that the bride has taken time and effort to beautify herself for her groom.

As the bride of Christ, what steps do you need to take to “put on” those godly characteristics that our Lord finds attractive in His people. Read Ephesians 4:22–32 and Colossians 3:5–14. What does Paul’s suggested “beauty regimen” for the believer look like? What are some practical ways you can begin to practice it? Choose one or two characteristics in particular and ask God for an opportunity to work on them today.

*The unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit . . . is of great worth in God’s sight.*

1 PETER 3:4



## TODAY AT MOODY

As an integral part of MBI’s Operations, our Engineering Services staff—Alfredo Rios, Paul Siebold, Andrew Thorsen, and Teddy Vinlasaca—ensure good maintenance and proper function of all the systems of the Institute’s infrastructure. Would you pray for them today?

*Then make  
my joy com-  
plete by being  
like-minded,  
having the  
same love.*

PHILIPPIANS 2:2



#### TODAY AT MOODY

Thank you for mentioning Moody's media ministry in your prayers today. Your prayer support advances the Institute's global impact through media: radio, publishing, and video.

### Read: Song of Solomon 1:15–17

#### TODAY IN THE WORD



In his book *The Five Love Languages*, Gary Chapman explains that every person uses a favorite “language” when expressing love to another person. Some people may use physical touch, in the form of a hug or a kiss. Others communicate love through action, by performing acts of service for others. To some a gift is the best way to show love, while others simply prefer to spend time with someone they love.

In today's passage the bride and groom use words to express their love for one another. The groom speaks first and compliments the appearance of his bride. In particular, he singles out her eyes. The point of comparing them to doves is not entirely clear. Some have suggested that the comparison reflects an Egyptian custom of painting eyes in the shape that resembled a bird. Others believe it was the beauty of the dove, or even the fact that doves are often found in pairs, that prompted the comparison.

Similarly, the bride compliments the groom's appearance. He is handsome and “charming.” This latter term could refer to his physical appearance or to his manner. The Hebrew word is used elsewhere in the Old Testament to refer to both goodness and charm.

The mutuality of their love is reflected in the fact that both the groom and the bride use the same language to refer to one

another. The groom declares that the bride is “beautiful.” The bride uses a masculine form of the same word when she declares that the groom is “handsome.” It is the same word used in the Old Testament to characterize Joseph and David.

After showering compliments on one another, the couple goes on to praise the delights of the home and the marriage bed that they share. The bed is “verdant,” or more literally “green,” a possible allusion to the fact that the bed was strewn with fresh rushes each day. The Hebrew term for bed here (verse 16) is used in Amos 6:4 to refer to an expensive bed inlaid with ivory. It seems clear that the groom made an effort to create a romantic atmosphere for his bride.

#### TODAY ALONG THE WAY



One of the keys to keeping the romance kindled in a relationship is to express love to one another. The couple in today's passage made an effort to express love to one another verbally. The groom used an additional love language by taking steps to create a romantic atmosphere.

Is there someone who needs to hear you express your love? To which love language do they respond the most? Think of a concrete way to show them love today in a way that they will most appreciate.

*Read: Song of Solomon 2:1–7*

## TODAY IN THE WORD



The British mathematician Charles Babbage wrote to Alfred Tennyson

complaining that two lines from his poem “The Vision of Sin” were inaccurate. The lines went, “Every moment dies a man / Every moment one is born.” Babbage argued that if this were true, world population would never change. Instead, he wrote, the lines ought to read: “Every moment dies a man / Every moment one and one-sixteenth is born.”

Babbage missed the point, though. He tried to analyze the poetic words of Tennyson in a way that missed their true meaning. Poets throughout the ages have used figurative language to make a point.

The lovers in the Song of Solomon use poetic comparisons to express their love for one another. The bride compares herself to two flowers. The rose of Sharon was not a rose like we usually know it but a wildflower much like a crocus. The crocus was a common sight on the plain of Sharon, a region known for fertility (cf. Isa. 35:1–2). In the same way, the lily of the valley was not the white lily. The Hebrew word referred to a variety of flowers, including the blue lotus, the water lily, or almost any brightly colored flower.

By employing such metaphors, the bride indicates that she sees nothing unique about her own beauty. Like the wildflowers in the field, she is just one among many. The groom,

however, sees her differently. Compared to her, all the other flowers are thorns. She is like a beautiful flower growing in the midst of a bramble patch.

The bride responds by describing the groom with a comparison of her own. She imagines herself coming upon an apple tree blooming in the midst of a wood. The fruit of the wild apple tree was usually somewhat bitter, but her lover’s fruit is sweet to the taste. He has taken her to his “banquet hall.” According to the Jewish historian Josephus, Solomon built a glorious feasting hall decorated with gold and expensive furniture. Some Arabic poetry describes a custom where people would place a sign outside the home inviting guests to a party. In this case, however, the banner outside the banquet hall announces not a party, but love.

## TODAY ALONG THE WAY



The expressions of love in today’s passage occur on several levels. Both

bride and groom use words to express how they feel. The groom also broadcasts his love by placing a banner over the bride. They express love to each other through private intimacy.

If you are married, what is the most effective way for you to express love to your spouse on each of these levels today? If you are not married, you may have family members or friends who need a word of appreciation or a hug or pat on the back.

*The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband.*

1 CORINTHIANS 7:3



## TODAY AT MOODY

The work of Moody Publishers’ Editorial team—Alice Childers, David DeWit, Carolyn McDaniel, Pamela Pugh, and James Vincent—contributes to the high quality and wide range of Christian publishing at MBI. We appreciate their dedicated service and uphold them in prayer. today.

# Question Answer

**Q** *Why did God tell the children of Israel to kill all the Gentiles in the Promised Land after having told them in the Ten Commandments not to kill?*

**A** First, in most versions of the Bible, including the *New King James Version*, the sixth of the Ten Commandments is rendered "You shall not murder." It was not intended to prohibit executions, which are official killings done by a state. Exodus 21, which immediately follows the account of God giving the Ten Commandments, lists capital crimes for which offenders were to be executed, thereby proving that the intention of the commandment is to prohibit "murder," not totally ban "killing."

Three reasons may be given for God's command to kill the Canaanites in the Promised Land. First, the nations occupying the land would not have meekly made room for the people of Israel. Second, their corporate sins were such that God decided to destroy them, not move them to another land. They were guilty of the abominations listed in Leviticus 18. God told Moses that the land and the people were defiled, and therefore they had to be dealt with, even as He had dealt with the gods of Egypt (Num. 33:4).

A third reason for destroying the Canaanites was the likelihood that they would corrupt the people of Israel if they were left in the land. That is precisely what happened. Because Israel did not kill all these nations, Israel became worse than the original inhabitants of Canaan and had to be sent into exile as judgment. See Deuteronomy 7:1-6; 2 Kings 17:7-23; 2 Chronicles 36:16-21.

**Q** *Is there an unforgivable sin? If so, can a Christian commit that sin?*

**A** Yes, there is an unforgivable sin. It is blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. Jesus says, "Anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or the age to come" (Matt. 12:32). His opponents were saying, "He has an evil spirit," when in fact Jesus was filled with the Holy Spirit (Mark 3:30).

The context in which His statement occurs reveals first that the Holy Spirit represents God in general (see Rom. 8:9); and second, that the blasphemer in this passage ascribes to Beelzebul (Satan) miracles that were indisputably manifestations of the power and presence of God. In the face of

powerful evidence of divine activity, the Pharisees said, "It is by the prince of demons that he drives out demons" (Matt. 9:34). This refusal to recognize the power of God and instead attribute it to Satan is blasphemy.

Can a Christian commit that sin? No, for a Christian has already acknowledged the power of the Holy Spirit to forgive sins and give salvation.

**Q** *Are we living in the end times?*

**A** Yes, we are! Soon after the Ascension, in his first public sermon the apostle Peter explained the phenomenon of tongues as a fulfillment of a prophecy of Joel: "In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people" (Acts 2:17). Later, the apostle John said, "Dear children, this is the last hour" (1 John 2:18). If saints living about two thousand years ago were in the last hour, so are we. But if you use the expression "end times" to mean a year or two, more or less, before the Lord returns, my answer is, I don't know. I don't know when the Lord will come. Neither does anybody else.

**Q** *How can I know the Bible is complete?*

**A** Books about the formation of the canon (the official list of the books that constitute the Bible) are available in Christian bookstores. What they affirm, among other things, is that writings admitted to the canon of Old Testament books were written by prophets, and the New Testament books were written by apostles. Two truths need to be emphasized: first, the canon did not confer authenticity on the books it accepted; it just acknowledged an authenticity and authority already widely recognized by God's people. Second, with the passing of the Apostles, no one was left who had actually heard and seen what the Lord had said and done. No one remained to whom He had promised the help of the Holy Spirit in remembering all that He had said (John 14:25-26; 16:13). Thus, the canon was finished.

*Is there an  
unforgivable  
sin?*

*Let us  
not give up  
meeting  
together.*

HEBREWS 10:25



#### TODAY AT MOODY

Please include in your prayer time the MBI computer specialists team headed by Frank Leber, Vice President of Information Systems. We ask that God would guide them in the service of the Institute's departments.

*Read: Song of Solomon 2:8-9*

#### TODAY IN THE WORD



According to an old saying, "Absence makes the heart grow fonder." But another saying warns that separation can have the opposite effect: "Out of sight, out of mind." Which of these is true? It often depends on the situation. Sometimes being with those we love causes us to take them for granted. Once we are apart, we realize how much their presence means to us. On the other hand, sometimes being separated may cause us to become distracted with other things to the point that we scarcely think of our loved one at all.

In today's verses from the Song of Solomon, the bride waits with expectation for the groom's arrival. She hears and sees the groom from afar. The groom comes seeking the bride with such intensity that the obstacles (the hills) seem like nothing. The bride compares him to a gazelle or a young stag. Gazelles were known for their grace and speed. The stag was famous for its ability to leap. The bride's portrait depicts the groom as one who is in eager pursuit.

However, this portrait also reveals the potential for separation in the relationship. Despite his eagerness, the groom can only see the one he loves from a distance. He gazes longingly upon her through the window and the lattice. This portrays separation and desire. The groom has exerted considerable effort to seek the one he loves. He initiates this relationship and

does whatever he must to maintain it.

Like many exchanges described in the Song of Solomon, the scene in today's passage has something to say to us on two levels. As an example of human love, it is a good reminder that love cannot be maintained without a measure of effort. In particular, it provides a model of the kind of initiative the husband should take in his love relationship with his spouse.

On a spiritual level, it paints a beautiful picture of God's seeking love. He is the God who is found by those who did not seek Him (Rom. 10:20). He is the God who sent His Son to seek and to save the lost (Luke 19:10). He is the God we love because He first loved us (1 John 4:19).

#### TODAY ALONG THE WAY



In a love relationship we must take initiative on two levels. We must take the initiative to show others that we love them, and we must respond to the love that others show to us.

Take some time today to examine your relationships. Can you identify those toward whom you must show the love of Christ? Should you express yourself by deed, by word, or by touch? Now think about how you should respond to those who have shown love to you. Do not leave them feeling as if they are on the outside looking in.

*Read: Song of Solomon 2:10-14*

#### TODAY IN THE WORD



In “Morning Hymn,” author Thomas Ken issues an invitation to himself: “Awake, my soul, and with the sun/Thy daily stage of duty run; Shake off dull sloth, and joyful rise/To pay thy morning sacrifice. Awake, lift up thyself, my heart, And with the angels bear thy part, Who all night long unwearied sing/High praises to the eternal King.”

The hymnwriter’s words are a reminder that, when it comes to experiencing fellowship with God, complacency may be one of the greatest obstacles we face. At times we are reluctant to seek God because we are too distracted by the cares of the day. At other times we are unwilling because it requires too much effort.

During such moments we need more than a reminder of our duty. We also need a reminder of the joy that comes when we experience intimacy with God.

The bride in today’s passage needed a similar reminder. The lover calls to the bride as he gazes through the lattice and invites her to arise and come with him. Some commentators suggest that the Hebrew words emphasize the significance of the invitation for the bride. Like the hymnwriter, the lover calls upon the bride to “shake off dull sloth” and enjoy the delights of spending time together with him.

The season alone is reason enough! Winter, the rainy season in Palestine, has ended. In

fact, the Hebrew phrase that is translated “is past” literally means “is over and gone.” It is as if the lover meant to imply that it was high time for the two of them to be together.

The groom also declares that the time had come for flowers to appear, an event that marked the arrival of spring and occurred almost overnight. The early blossoming of the fig tree provided another sign of spring’s arrival.

However, the most compelling reason offered by the groom was simply the pleasure he found in hearing the sweet voice of his beloved. Likewise, your heavenly Lover never tires of hearing your voice when you address Him in prayer.

#### TODAY ALONG THE WAY



Thomas Ken writes: “Glory to Thee, who safe hast kept, And hast refreshed me while I slept; Grant, Lord, when I from death shall wake, I may of endless life partake. Lord, I my vows to Thee renew: Scatter my sins as morning dew; Guard my first springs of thought and will, And with Thyself my spirit fill. Direct, control, suggest this day, All I design, or do, or say; That all my powers, with all their might, In Thy sole glory may unite.” Why not write your own morning prayer and read it aloud to the Lord? Or simply read this hymn aloud.

*I will come  
back and  
take you to  
be with me.*

JOHN 14:3



#### TODAY AT MOODY

We’d like to thank God today for the dedicated team in the Network and Systems Support department: Paul Walker, Erik Widholm, and Henry Wollman. Their computer expertise adds an important part to the big picture of God’s work at Moody.

*Watch your  
life and  
doctrine  
closely.*

1 TIMOTHY 4:16



**TODAY AT MOODY**

MBI's Provost, Dr. Charles Dyer, requests your prayers today for the training of young people at MBI for the ministry in our changing world. May the Moody education continue to have the Word of God as its foundation and the Holy Spirit its guide.

*Read: Song of Solomon 2:15*

**TODAY IN THE WORD**



Although the Hebrew word translated "foxes" in today's reading can also refer to the jackal, the reference to its size suggests that the small Fennec Fox is in view. Grapes were one of their favorite foods and they were capable of doing considerable damage to the vineyard.

It is unclear who is speaking in this verse. The fact that the invitation in the previous verses contains a loving challenge for the bride to stir herself in response to the lover's call suggests that the groom is speaking here. The Jewish *Targum*, an oral translation of the Hebrew Scriptures in Aramaic, interpreted the foxes as an allusion to the Amalakites. Hebrew commentaries known as *Midrashim* interpreted the foxes as a reference to other enemies of Israel, such as the Assyrians, the Amorites, and the Edomites.

Christian interpreters have interpreted the foxes as a picture of those things that hinder the believer's fellowship with Christ. H. A. Ironside commented on this verse, "What are the little foxes that spoil the vine? I can tell you a good many. There are the little foxes of vanity, of pride, of envy, of evil speaking, of impurity (I think this though is a wolf instead of a little fox). Then there are the foxes of carelessness, of neglect of the Bible, of neglect of prayer, of neglect of fellowship with the people of God. These are the

things that spoil the vine, that hinder spiritual growth."

Neglect is also a problem in human relationships. A little neglect can cause a once-thriving relationship to go into decline. They are often "little foxes," choices and actions that seem insignificant at the time, but whose cumulative effect destroys the relationships we cherish most. They may take the form of allowing our jobs to consume our attention so that we neglect those we love, or allowing a passing attraction to someone else to go unchecked.

Some people suggest that this metaphor of the vineyard refers to the bride herself. Sometimes the best way to tend to our relationships is to tend to ourselves. A vital relationship with Christ and a proper ordering of our priorities goes a long way to keep the "foxes" at bay.

**TODAY ALONG THE WAY**



Remember, a fox may seem cute and harmless when viewed from a distance, but if left unchecked it will eventually destroy the vineyard. Can you identify the "little foxes" that cause problems in your spiritual life? What about in your friendships and family relationships? If you have trouble identifying them, ask someone you trust for a candid opinion. Talk together about a practical strategy to help you to "catch" the foxes. You may also want to agree to meet later for accountability on following through with your strategy.

*Read: Song of Solomon 2:16–17*

#### TODAY IN THE WORD



One of the most beloved characters in J. R. R. Tolkien's trilogy *The Lord of*

*the Rings* is Treebeard, an ancient creature known as an Ent, a shepherd of the trees. Treebeard tells how in their wandering the Ents forgot where the Entwives had settled. "The Ents," Tolkien writes, "gave their love to things they met in the world, and Entwives gave their thought to other things." Eventually the wandering Ents forgot where the Entwives lived.

Tolkien's story may be fantasy, but the problem he describes is not. People who once loved each other deeply can become so preoccupied with other things that they drift apart. In time, like the Ents, they forget how to find their way back to a place of intimacy.

The groom in the Song of Solomon is also a shepherd who "pastures his flock among the lilies." Commentators are divided in their opinion about this statement. It could be taken literally, describing the groom by his profession. On the surface this seems out of place with the indication given elsewhere in this book that the groom was actually King Solomon (cf. Song 3:11; 8:11–12). However, elsewhere Scripture characterizes Israel's leaders as "shepherds" (cf. Jer. 3:15). It has even been suggested that Solomon took time off from his royal responsibilities to spend time as a shepherd in the Baal-hamon area.

Others see the lilies as an allegory. In one of his sermons St. Bernard said that the lilies in verse 16 represent Christ's truth, meekness, and goodness. If this were the case, though, we would expect the bride to be the one browsing among the lilies.

It is more likely that the phrase is simply the bride's poetic way of describing the groom's manner. Unlike the Ents, who forgot their wives, he is a tender shepherd who will gently care for the one he loves. Physical expressions of love have an important place in their marriage relationship.

Ultimately, their love is rooted in a deep commitment. They enjoy the physical benefits of the marriage, but it does not define their relationship. Their marriage is a covenant relationship. As the bride says, "My lover is mine and I am his."

#### TODAY ALONG THE WAY



In his commentary on the Song of Solomon entitled *A Song for Lovers*,

S. Craig Glickman observes that it is a mistake to think that we can only be happy in a relationship when our partner is "the best looking, most intelligent, most sensitive person in the world. You don't look at the other person as a status symbol who will raise your level of prestige," Glickman writes. "You look at that one as your counterpart, the one who completes you, the one with whom you can joyfully affirm your belongingness."

*I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me.*

JOHN 10:14



#### TODAY AT MOODY

For the next several days we invite you to pray for the faculty and staff of the Sacred Music department, as they lead our students into the wonderful world of music—for the glory of God. David Brackley, Edwin Childs, Gerald Edmonds, and Ronald Denison are in our prayers today.

*How long,  
O Lord?  
Will you  
forget me  
forever?*

PSALM 13:1



#### TODAY AT MOODY

Continue in prayer for the Sacred Music faculty: David Gauger, Julia Graddy, Susan Clark Manns, and Elizabeth Naegele. Ask the Lord to encourage and protect those of our students and faculty who are on the road this summer with our music group tours.

*Read: Song of Solomon 3:1–5*

#### TODAY IN THE WORD



Mother Teresa's work with the poor in Calcutta was widely publicized during her lifetime. Few, however, knew that she struggled for many years with spiritual doubt. Nearly a decade after the vivid spiritual experience that convinced Mother Teresa that God had called her to establish an organization to work with the poor, she recorded the following words in her journal: "I feel that God does not want me, that God is not God, and that God does not exist."

Sometimes referred to as the "dark night of the soul," such experiences are common among believers. The Puritan writer Samuel Rutherford used the term *desertions* to describe these feelings, saying of them, "I think they are like a lean and weak land lying fallow for some years, until it gathers sap for a better crop."

The psalmist also spoke of a similar experience when he asked in Psalm 13:1, "How long will you hide your face from me?" The answer to the psalmist's question is that although God may seem absent for a time, He will not "forget" forever.

Many commentators believe that the events in today's reading are actually a dream sequence. Its imagery reflects the bride's longing to consummate her love with the groom. After searching through the city streets, she finally finds him and clings to him in love. Those who go through the dark night of the

soul are like her. They may spend many hours searching for God. This seems to be God's purpose for such trials. They are not meant to be a punishment but a blessing, intended to create spiritual hunger. God uses them to renew our longing for spiritual intimacy with Him (Isa. 26:9).

It is important to remember that although we may sometimes feel as if God has deserted us, He never removes His love. He has promised that He will never leave or forsake us (Ps. 94:14). Christ has promised to be with us always, until the very end of the age (Matt. 28:20). The reality of Christ's presence in our lives does not depend upon our experience—but upon His faithfulness.

#### TODAY ALONG THE WAY



When we experience a dark night of the soul, it is tempting to search for a way to jump start our spiritual experience to regain a sense of God's presence. The best strategy is simply to wait. Waiting does not mean that we are inactive—we continue to serve God and to practice the basic disciplines of the Christian life. One lesson God teaches us during a time of spiritual desertion is the importance of faithfulness. If you feel deserted by God, follow the advice of the psalmist: "Wait for the Lord and keep his way" (Ps. 37:34).

*Read: Song of Solomon 3:6–11*

#### TODAY IN THE WORD



In his essay entitled, “The Weight of Glory,” C. S. Lewis notes that the concept of glory is very prominent in the New Testament and is often associated with things like palms, crowns, white robes, thrones, and splendor like the sun and stars. “All this,” Lewis observes, “makes no immediate appeal to me at all, and in that respect I fancy that I am a typical modern.”

Nearly a century before Lewis wrote these words, Mark Twain made a similar observation about the biblical imagery of glory, when he wrote of harps and robes, “That sort of thing wouldn’t make a heaven—at least not a heaven that a sane man could stand a week and remain sane.”

Twain, of course, was no theologian; in fact, it seems that he wasn’t a believer. Yet the problem he identifies is the same one that Lewis mentions. In this world of earthly glitter and tangible reality, who can get excited about what seems on the surface to be a promise of some vague notion of glory? What good is a crown in heaven to someone who doesn’t wear a hat on earth?

According to Lewis, glory is a matter of being “noticed” by God, “Glory means good report with God, acceptance by God, response, acknowledgement, and welcome into the heart of things. The door on which we have been knocking all our lives will open at last.”

The appearance of the king and his retinue in today’s reading is described in terms that are best summarized with the word glory. Those who accompany the king share in his glory. What was true on an earthly level in this description will be true on spiritual level with those who accompany Christ when He returns. They will “appear with him in glory” (Col. 3:4).

This promise of glory provides the motivation for living a holy life. In Colossians 3:5 the apostle Paul commands, “Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry.”

#### TODAY ALONG THE WAY



The hope of glory helps us to live a holy life. The knowledge that we will one day return with Christ in glory motivates us to say “no” to the powerful impulses of our earthly nature and “yes” to God.

Read Colossians 3:1–17 and make a list of all the areas of life that are affected by the believer’s “hope of glory.” How does the hope described in these verses provide a motivation for you? Are there specific areas where you need to change? Spend time in prayer asking God to display His power in that area of your life.

*When Christ,  
who is your  
life, appears,  
then you also  
will appear  
with him  
in glory.*

COLOSSIANS 3:4



#### TODAY AT MOODY

Please add these members of the Sacred Music department to your prayer list today: Arnold Rawls, Gary Rownd, Jeremiah Selvey, and H. E. Singley. What a remarkable opportunity they have to minister to the students and the public through God’s gift of music!

*Charm is  
deceptive,  
and beauty  
is fleeting.*

PROVERBS 31:30



TODAY AT MOODY

In conclusion, would you pray for the Sacred Music's Terry Strandt,

Angela Thomas, Charles Thompson, Cynthia Uitermarkt, and Un-Young Whang?

May their voices and musical instruments carry the message of God's goodness, love, and salvation—to change lives!

*Read: Song of Solomon 4:1–5*

TODAY IN THE WORD



In a *Christianity Today* article entitled, “Is Beauty the Beast?” author

Karen Lee-Thorf notes that many Christians are uncomfortable with beauty and adornment because they believe such things lead to pride and division. “I am sure many of the people I know who are doing that are motivated by humility,” she writes. “I, however, have found that rejecting beauty can be as serious a sin as worshipping it.”

It has been said that “beauty is only skin deep.” It does, however, play an important role in human love. In his song the groom repeatedly praises the physical beauty of the beloved. Although the images he uses to describe her may seem strange, and perhaps even humorous, to us today, he praises the beauty of her eyes, face, form, and cascading hair.

The bride has taken steps to adorn herself. The reference to her scarlet lips suggests she used the Old Testament equivalent of makeup. However, she does not put herself on display. Instead, she wears a veil, a symbol of modesty in that day.

Physical beauty is a gift from God, but as we have seen, it cannot compare with the beauty of godly character. Physical beauty, the writer of Proverbs warns, is fleeting. It cannot last, and it may be deceptive. The fact that one has an attractive physique does not necessarily mean that the personality is also attractive. The

presence of beauty is also no guarantee of virtue. Scripture warns that a beautiful woman who lacks discretion is like a gold ring in a pig's snout (Prov. 11:22).

Karen Lee-Thorf's warning is important. Physical beauty is a gift from God worthy of celebration. There is no spiritual virtue in taking steps to detract from our appearance. We should not reject physical beauty. But neither should we trust in it.

Instead, Scripture urges us to take measures to cultivate beauty on a deeper level. We are to cultivate inner beauty, “the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight” (1 Peter 3:4). This kind of beauty never fades and is always in style.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY



Some people practice a daily “beauty regimen” that includes diet, exercise, and steps to make their outward appearance more attractive. The same can be true on a spiritual level.

Think about your own spiritual habits. Can you identify the concrete measures you take on a regular basis to cultivate the kind of inner beauty that Peter praises in 1 Peter 3:4? If not, what steps do you need to take to begin such a regimen? What, specifically, will you do and when will you start?

*Read: Song of Solomon 4:6–7*

#### TODAY IN THE WORD



A popular bumper sticker from a few years ago read, “Christians aren’t perfect, just forgiven.” Its point is well taken. Those who know Christ share many of the same weaknesses and failings as unbelievers. But this slogan is not entirely accurate.

In today’s reading Solomon summarizes his impression of the bride by declaring that there is no blemish in her. In human relationships, we can conclude this only by looking at another person through the eyes of love. For Christ’s bride, however, perfection is both a gift and responsibility.

When it comes to our standing before God, there is a sense in which Christians are already perfect. Those who know Jesus as Savior have been reconciled to God through the death of Christ. God sees them through the lens of Christ’s perfections. As a result, they will be presented to Him “without blemish and free from accusation” (Col. 1:21). According to the writer of Hebrews, “By one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy” (Heb. 10:14).

As far as the believer’s practice is concerned, there is still room for improvement. The apostle Paul’s goal in ministry was to present believers to Christ as “a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish” (Eph. 5:27). Similarly, Christians are com-

manded to “aim for perfection” in the way that they live (2 Cor. 13:11).

What, then, are the disciplines that lead to perfection? One of the most important is the discipline of studying God’s Word. The apostle Paul wrote that one of his chief aims in preaching God’s Word was to “present everyone perfect in Christ” (Col. 1:28). The one who studies the Bible will be “thoroughly equipped” (KJV: “perfect”) for every good work (2 Tim. 3:17).

Exercising control over one’s tongue is another discipline of perfection. It has the added benefit of helping us to practice self-control over other areas of life (James 3:1). Sinless perfection is not possible this side of heaven. Thanks to Christ, however, it is the believer’s ultimate destiny.

#### TODAY ALONG THE WAY



Use a concordance or Bible study software and do a search on the word *perfect*. In what sense can perfection be described as a goal in the Christian life? When can we expect it to be a state of being?

The fact that Christians are not yet perfect in their behavior does not mean that they should not aim for it. Because of the cross, the heavenly bride will one day have the joy of hearing Christ say, “All beautiful you are, my darling; there is no flaw in you” (Song 4:7).

*Christ loved  
the church  
and gave  
himself up  
for her.*

EPHESIANS 5:25



#### TODAY AT MOODY

Our Human Resources department, under the leadership of Vice President Lloyd Dodson, plays an important role in bringing new employees to Moody. We pray that the Lord would guide their efforts and the leadership of Mr. Dodson.

*We should  
love one  
another.*

1 JOHN 3:11



#### TODAY AT MOODY

Today, as we continue to pray for the Human Resources employees, we ask that God's blessings would follow the lives of Kelli Buczek, Jill Douglas, David Fogal, and Katie Isaak. We all value their dedicated service.

*Read: Song of Solomon 4:8-9*

#### TODAY IN THE WORD



Many of the most popular songs throughout history have described the thrills and frustrations of romance. Common themes include loving someone who apparently loves someone else, feeling unsure of someone else's romantic feelings, and the roller-coaster ride of falling in and out of love.

What usually passes for love in today's world, however, is often only self-gratification. This kind of "love" is primarily a matter of physical attraction. When the initial thrill of desire fades, so does the love of the one who experienced it. The groom's love for his bride was markedly different.

It did include physical attraction. The groom praised his bride's beauty and said that she had stolen his heart with one glance of her eyes. But his love was not selfish. Instead, it was characterized by a desire for the bride's well-being. He pleaded with her to come away from the lions' dens and the haunt of the leopards to a place of safety and intimacy.

An abiding concern for the other person and an atmosphere of intimacy are the primary ingredients in a healthy love relationship. They are also inter-related. A genuine concern for the other provides the kind of environment that in turn allows those who love one another the freedom to be intimate.

The rewards of biblical love come to those who give of

themselves on behalf of those they love. As scholar and author Miraslov Volf has observed, there is more to marital love than *eros*: "It has to do with how you treat each other when dishes need to be washed or garbage taken out, when misunderstandings arise and when one has transgressed against the other. Love is not the desire to be united with the other, but action on behalf of the other, and constancy in pursuit of his or her well-being."

Reckless passion may burn like a wildfire, white-hot at first but dying out as quickly as it flared up. Love, on the other hand, is an ember that burns slowly and steadily. It does not exist for its own sake but provides warmth for others.

#### TODAY ALONG THE WAY



Author Rainer Maria Rilke has written that "Love . . . consists in this, that two solitudes protect and border and salute each other." Human love is never completely devoid of self interest. However, the more we can nurture, protect, and respect the other, the greater the likelihood that our own desires will be satisfied.

Think of some concrete way to serve someone you love today. Perhaps it is by doing one of the chores they hate to do or by writing a brief note describing what you appreciate about them.

*Read: Song of Solomon 4:10–11*

## TODAY IN THE WORD



While on an expedition to Palestine, Mark Twain met a young man named

Charles Langdon from Elmira, New York. After the trip Twain visited Langdon at his home and fell in love with his sister Livy. When Langdon discovered this, he suggested that Twain leave immediately. Nobody was good enough to marry his sister. As they were about to depart, however, Twain was thrown from the seat of the wagon into the street. Although he was only dazed by the accident, Twain made the most of the opportunity. He remained with the Langdons for two more weeks and eventually married Livy.

Love, too, can make a person feel dazed. It is possible to be so overcome with love that the effect is like drunkenness. In our reading today, the groom says that the bride's love is more pleasing than wine. Elsewhere we read a description of the intoxicating effects of love (Prov. 5:19). This is a blessing, but it can also be a danger. Like the effects of wine, this rush of passion can lead to impaired judgment.

Sadly, later in life Solomon became a victim of this. We read in 1 Kings 11:1–2, Solomon “loved many foreign women besides Pharaoh’s daughter—Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians and Hittites. They were from nations about which the Lord had told the Israelites, ‘You must not intermarry with

them, because they will surely turn your hearts after their gods.’ Nevertheless, Solomon held fast to them in love.”

Scripture’s warning proved true. Solomon’s affection for his seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines prompted him to engage in false worship. “As Solomon grew old, his wives turned his heart after other gods, and his heart was not fully devoted to the Lord his God, as the heart of David his father had been” (1 Kings 11:4).

Solomon should have taken his own advice. In Proverbs 4:23 he warned, “Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life.” We too must be on guard. Once our affections have been stirred, it is all too easy to let them overrule our convictions.

## TODAY ALONG THE WAY



Few people begin their marriage believing that they will eventually commit adultery. But misplaced affections can impair our judgment. The path to infidelity is a subtle one. It often begins with chaste friendship accompanied by a strong sense of attraction. As affections grow, the people involved grow more and more careless in their behavior.

Have you discussed a strategy for protecting yourself from this painful path with your spouse or (if you are single) with a pastor or close friend?

*Why be  
captivated, my  
son, by an  
adulteress?*

PROVERBS 5:20



## TODAY AT MOODY

Jean Jacobsen, Peter Miller, and Serene Velasco from Human Resources will appreciate your prayers today, as they oversee many aspects of our work environment. And they do a great job!

*Each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable.*

1 THESSALONIANS 4:4



#### TODAY AT MOODY

Let's continue to ask for God's leading and direction in the service of Edward Cannon, Executive Vice President and Chief Administrative Officer. Our prayer is that the Lord would keep him focused and insightful in his ministry at MBI.

*Read: Song of Solomon 4:12-16*

#### TODAY IN THE WORD



Despite evidence that indicates they are effective, abstinence programs continue to be a controversial approach to sex education in many public schools. Most abstinence programs do not use the Bible to convince young people not to have sex before marriage, but their strategy is based upon the old-fashioned biblical value of chastity.

Usually supporters argue that they do a better job of protecting young people from unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases. One program in Tennessee, for example, was credited with helping the county drop its state ranking in teen pregnancies from first to sixty-fourth, accomplished in three years.

In today's reading, we find another important benefit to chastity. It not only protects from disease and unwanted pregnancy, it also enhances the beauty of sex in marriage.

The groom praises the chaste character of his bride by describing her as a "garden locked up," a "spring enclosed" and a "sealed fountain." The practice of abstinence did not make her seem like a prude, but rather like a beautiful private garden. Old Testament commentator Franz Delitzsch notes, "To a locked garden and spring no one has access but the rightful owner, and a sealed fountain is shut against all impurity."

The practice of chastity is not rooted in a hatred of sex but

an understanding of its true value. The chaste person recognizes the beauty of moral purity. Abstinence did not make the bride less attractive to Solomon, it increased his longing for her. Moral purity enhances one's enjoyment of sex.

Recognizing that her husband was the only one with rightful access to the delights of her garden, the bride invited the groom to "come into his garden and taste its choice fruits" (v. 16). Such language indicates that chastity ultimately recognizes true ownership. Those who practice chastity realize that their bodies are not their own to do with as they please. They belong to God first and foremost (1 Cor. 6:13). And should God provide us with a spouse, then there is also a sense in which our bodies belong to them (1 Cor. 7:4).

#### TODAY ALONG THE WAY



Chastity is a relevant issue for single and married alike. Both have an obligation to control their own bodies that today's verse describes as "in a way that is holy and honorable" (1 Thess. 4:4). For the single person this means abstaining from sexual activity until marriage. For the married person it means keeping the gate to this garden of secret delights locked to all but one's spouse. Hebrews 13:4 warns, "Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral."

*Read: Song of Solomon 5:1*

## TODAY IN THE WORD



While the church has always valued moral purity, at some points in history it has felt ambivalent about marriage. Sex in particular, even within the confines of marriage, has been an uncomfortable subject. As early as the second century, some Christian leaders reacted against growing worldliness in the church by urging believers to practice extreme forms of asceticism. They even urged married believers to abstain from sex altogether—or at least not to enjoy it too much.

This point of view was reflected in the “desert fathers” of the second century, who chose to live a solitary and ascetic lifestyle. They told the married believers who came to them for spiritual counsel to live like celibate monks. Augustine taught that sexual intercourse, even in marriage, should not be enjoyed for its own sake. He believed that it was only for the propagation of mankind.

This stands in sharp contrast with today’s sex-obsessed culture. Wendy Shalit, in her book entitled *A Return to Modesty*, noted that sex on many college campuses today is so frequent and impersonal that the two partners may as well be “two airplanes refueling.”

Both views—the aversion of some in the early church to sex within the confines of marriage, and modern society’s casual approach to sex—are equally unhealthy and unbiblical. The Song of Solomon does

not portray sexual pleasures in marriage as a necessary evil that must be suppressed or endured. Instead, the bride and groom are encouraged to enjoy themselves until they are satisfied (v. 1).

Procreation is certainly one of the obvious purposes of sex within marriage. The first command to the human race recorded in Scripture was the command to “be fruitful and increase in number” (Gen. 1:22). But as we see in the Song of Solomon, enjoying sex in marriage is also important.

The New Testament notes that there are certain instances where it is good not to marry (1 Cor. 7:1). It also emphasizes that marriage is the only appropriate context for sexual expression. God has designed marriage and sex for more than simply propagating the human race.

## TODAY ALONG THE WAY



Every day we face a constant barrage of sexual images from films, television programs, and magazines. Passion, however, is not the problem. Society’s problem is not that it enjoys sex too much. The problem is that our culture has removed the boundaries God set in place for sexual expression. His rules are not intended to spoil our fun, but to protect us from the consequences of unbridled passion. Those who choose to quench the fires of passion by having sex outside the confines of the marriage relationship are destined to get burned.

*Enjoy life  
with your  
wife, whom  
you love.*

ECCLESIASTES 9:9



## TODAY AT MOODY

The MBI campus is very quiet now—the students are away on vacation. And today we’d like to invite you to uphold them in prayer—wherever they are—for a good rest, spiritual refreshment, and growth in commitment to God and His Word.

*Yet I hold this  
against you:  
You have for-  
saken your  
first love.*

REVELATION 2:4



#### TODAY AT MOODY

Dr. Richard Epps, Vice President of Stewardship, leads the ministry to our donors. In his words, "Stewardship at Moody is a two-way street." He expresses appreciation in prayer to the Moody friends for the outstanding "journey" along that street.

*Read: Song of Solomon 5:2-3*

#### TODAY IN THE WORD



Not long after they were married, Queen Victoria and Prince Albert had an argument. Afterwards the prince left the room in anger, went to his private quarters, and locked the door. Victoria followed him and knocked loudly at the door demanding that he let her in. "Who's there?" Albert answered, knowing full well that it was his wife. "The queen of England, and she demands to be admitted." This went on for some time. Each time Albert refused to admit her. At last, Victoria gave the door a soft tap. "Who's there?" the prince asked again. The queen gently replied, "Your wife, Albert." The prince opened the door and let her in.

The phrase "the honeymoon is over" alludes to the fact that people who have been married awhile sometimes act differently from those who are recently married. The same can be true in the spiritual realm. Those who begin the Christian life with great zeal can grow cold. In our verse for today, we see Jesus' criticism of the church of Ephesus because they had forsaken their first love.

In today's reading the groom comes seeking the bride at what seems to be an inopportune time. Her initial response is one of reluctance. When she finally does open the door, she discovers that the moment has passed. Her lover has departed.

According to noted Bible teacher H. A. Ironside, this is a good picture of our insensitivity

to divine love. "We have an idea that the beloved one should be ready whenever we are for a time of gladness together, but it is not always so," he explains. "And so when He comes to the heart's door we practically say, 'No; it is inconvenient. I do not want to drop things right now.'"

Unlike Queen Victoria's initial knocks at the door, Jesus does not come with a thundering voice and demand entrance. Instead, we often experience His invitations to fellowship as a subtle desire to spend time with Him in prayer and the study of God's Word. Like Solomon's bride, we may even be awakened in the middle of the night with a sense that we should get up and fellowship with Him. These opportunities are easy to ignore—but we miss them at our own loss.

#### TODAY ALONG THE WAY



One of the ancient spiritual disciplines of the church is a practice known as a "vigil." A vigil is a time of prayer, worship or fasting, often during the night.

Consider choosing a day to rise several hours earlier than usual to spend time with the Lord. Instead of praying through your usual requests, spend the time expressing your appreciation to God for His various attributes. For some of these attributes, you can refer to the "Theology Matters" columns throughout the 2004 issues of *Today in the Word*.

*Read: Song of Solomon 5:4-7*

## TODAY IN THE WORD



“God will not accept a divided heart,”

D. L. Moody once observed. “He must

be absolute monarch. There is not room in your heart for two thrones.” Because of this, God sometimes leads us through difficulties that test our motives and enable us to develop an undivided heart.

This also happened to the bride in Song of Solomon. After her initial reluctance, she finally responded to her lover’s overtures. The delay was costly. Once her interest was aroused and she opened the door to him, he could not be found. His absence sparked her desire and motivated her to seek him with renewed passion.

The search, however, was not an easy one. She did not find him immediately, and during her travels she encountered the city watchmen. They badly mistreated her and stole her cloak, which some scholars suggest was a wedding gift from her groom.

The bride’s experience is analogous to what happens to human relationships and our relationship with God. In marriage, neglect inevitably leads to a loss of intimacy. If we look for help from the wrong source, we may end up bruised by the experience. Likewise, God sometimes uses the bumps and bruises of life to show that only He can provide ultimate comfort. The sufferings we experience drive us closer to Him.

Our verse for today captures this. The psalmist is thankful for his affliction, but this doesn’t mean that he enjoyed suffering. Rather, he learned to rejoice in the lessons he learned as a result of his suffering.

Those who know Christ as Savior also benefit from affliction. The apostle Paul wrote that we rejoice in suffering, not for its own sake, but because of what it produces in our lives (Rom. 5:3). God uses suffering to teach us to persevere and to reveal our true character. If we are devoted to Christ, we will not turn back because of hard times. Instead, we will seek Him all the more. We will not be discouraged by obstacles or deterred by opposition we face. We will pursue the lover of our souls no matter who or what stands in our path.

## TODAY ALONG THE WAY



Think of a time when hardship or disappointment prompted you to

renew your determination to seek Christ. How did God use it to sift through your motives and give you singleness of heart? Would you say that you feel the same degree of devotion to Him today? If so, give thanks to God. If not, give some thought to the steps you might need to take to seek Him with a more fully devoted heart. When you are finished, write a love letter to Jesus telling Him of your fresh resolve to follow after Him.

*It was good for me to be afflicted so that I might learn your decrees.*

PSALM 119:71



## TODAY AT MOODY

On today’s Father’s Day, as we honor our fathers, let’s look once again at the Father’s love of God and praise Him for His love, mercy, and grace. What a joy it is to be a child of God and to come to Him with Jesus’ words, “Our Father in heaven.”

*At that time  
men will see  
the Son of  
Man coming  
in clouds with  
great power  
and glory.*

MARK 13:26



#### TODAY AT MOODY

Chief Financial Officer and Treasurer, Richard Campbell, provides overall direction to MBI's financial management. Please join him in thanking God for creating unique financial partnerships with our donors over the years and blessing the ministries of Moody.

*Read: Song of Solomon 5:8–16*

#### TODAY IN THE WORD



According to a story in the *Christian Reader* by Ida Pardue, shortly

before four-year-old Kathie was to serve as a flower girl in a wedding, her mother told her: “The next time you see Kim, she’ll be radiant.” During the wedding, Kathie watched the bride with a growing sense of disappointment. When she couldn’t contain herself any longer, the little girl went up to the bride, pulled at her gown to get her attention, and demanded, “Kim, when are you going to glow?”

One of the highlights of any wedding is the moment when the bride first appears. The music swells, the congregation rises, and the groom looks down the aisle to see the one he loves dressed in a “radiant” gown.

In today’s passage, it is the groom who is described as “radiant,” a Hebrew word that literally means “dazzling.” Like David his father, Solomon is also characterized as “ruddy.” This was a mark of physical attractiveness in Solomon’s day (cf. 1 Sam. 16:12). The bride admires Solomon’s dark hair and beautiful eyes, commenting on her beloved’s physical features from head to toe.

Some commentators have interpreted this image of Christ in her description. But we shouldn’t think of this as a picture of His physical appearance, or we’ll miss the powerful imagery of Christ as our Bridegroom. Just as the bride

was overwhelmed when she saw the one she loved in his splendor, we too will be overcome when we see Christ in His glory (Rev. 1:13–17).

Those who have placed their faith in Christ do not need to fear that day. They will appear with Him in glory (Col. 3:4). Those who have not trusted in Christ will also be overwhelmed by His glory, but with a different result. They will call on the rocks and mountains to fall on them and hide them from the wrath of Christ but to no avail (Rev. 6:16). Only those who have experienced God’s grace will be able to endure the radiance of Christ’s glory.

#### TODAY ALONG THE WAY



What is the most beautiful sight you have ever witnessed? Perhaps it was a beautiful sunset or waterfall that you saw while on vacation. It may have been the look on someone’s face when they opened a special gift from you. Or it may have been the moment when your spouse first came into view on the day of your wedding.

Spend some time recalling the experience. Now consider that, if you are a Christian, the thrill you felt at that moment will be compounded beyond imagination when you see Christ.

*Read: Song of Solomon 6:1-3*

## TODAY IN THE WORD



Dr. Henry Brandt has written that mature love “enjoys being together more

than being with anyone else, although others are not excluded from their lives. They discover that each can even have a good time doing something together which neither would enjoy doing alone.” What Brandt is really saying, in essence, is that someone who is in love enjoys showing interest in what interests the one he or she loves.

Although the groom has departed as a result of her delay, the bride is able to find him because she knows his interests. He is “browsing among the lilies.” The question in verse 1 is asked by the daughters of Jerusalem. They serve a function in this poem similar to the chorus in a Greek drama. Their statements move the story along and prompt revealing statements from the main characters.

Some Bible scholars interpret the bride’s statement symbolically. The image of the garden was used earlier to refer to the bride herself. It is also possible to take the bride’s words literally. After finding his bride unwilling to receive him, Solomon has gone down to his favorite garden. Knowing what he loves is the key to finding him. Showing an interest in what interests him provides a kind of common ground that will enable them to re-establish intimacy with one another.

Three important facts lay the groundwork for this couple’s restored relationship. First, she knows her husband well enough to know where to look. Solomon, in turn, knew his bride well enough not to try to force intimacy until she was ready. Second, both continue to be committed to the relationship. Third, as soon as both are ready, they take time together to restore their relationship.

This principle is true in the marriage relationship. One way to keep the romance alive is often to know what interests the one you love.

It is also an important principle for the believer’s love relationship with Christ. The best way to cultivate a sense of His presence is to cultivate an interest in what interests Him.

## TODAY ALONG THE WAY



Think of someone you love. How quickly can you come up with a “top

ten” list of the things that interest that person? If ten things seem like too many, try making a list of the top three or four. You might also want to rank them in order of importance.

After you have compiled your list, why not test the results by asking that person how accurate it is? Make plans together to share one of the interests you have identified.

*You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.*

JEREMIAH 29:13



## TODAY AT MOODY

Our Customer Service Center receives thousands of phone calls, and today and tomorrow we’d like to pray for those whose voices you hear when you call 1-800-DL MOODY: Lornel Curey, Caleb Evans, Janet Giesler, and Marina Ramos.

*Worship the  
Lord in the  
splendor of  
his holiness.*

1 CHRONICLES 16:29



**TODAY AT MOODY**

Praying for our Customer Service Representatives, please bring before the Lord Daniel Spurrier, Adam Reece, Julie Reeser, and Erin Reynolds. Would you pray for positive attitude, focus, attention to detail—something they constantly need at their workplace?

*Read: Song of Solomon 6:4–7*

**TODAY IN THE WORD**



An old cliché notes that beauty is in the eye of the beholder. Although this may be true, not many people think of themselves as attractive. Such feelings are often the result of unrealistic expectations. Few of us, either men or women, compare with the air-brushed images we see on television programs and magazine covers.

Strange as it may seem, even many professional models are unhappy with their personal appearance. They recognize that the image the public sees is not realistic. It is the result of many hours of preparation, occasional tricks of photography, and sometimes even cosmetic surgery.

In today's reading the groom describes the bride as "beautiful." He focuses on the beauty of her face. He praises the beauty of her eyes, hair, and smile. The fact that he compares the bride to an army in battle array may seem strange. It is a fitting image when placed on the lips of a king. In effect, it is the groom's way of saying that his bride is irresistible.

He also compares the bride to the two great cities. Tirzah, the first to be mentioned, served as the capital of the northern kingdom of Israel for a time. Jerusalem was the capital of Judah. The mention of these two cities has led some scholars to conclude that this song must have been composed after the kingdom divided in

931 B.C. and that the author uses Solomon as the example of the loving groom.

The groom is so overwhelmed by the bride that he cannot look into her eyes. This description of the bride is striking in view of her perception of herself. She did not initially see herself as lovely (Song 1:6). In a sense, the love of her husband has transformed her.

This is true of Christ and His heavenly bride. When He looks at us, He sees us through the eyes of His transforming grace. He not only sees us as beautiful, but He also has the power to make us beautiful. As a result of His work we can worship God in the beauty of His holiness.

**TODAY ALONG THE WAY**



How does Christ view the church?

One way to answer this question is to study the descriptive terms Paul used in his letters to the church in the New Testament.

In 1 Corinthians 1:2, the church is described as "sanctified" and "called to be holy." In Ephesians 1:1 the believers are called "the faithful in Christ Jesus." For further study, we suggest you read the first few verses of each of the New Testament epistles and write down the characteristics of the church that you find listed there.

*Read: Song of Solomon 6:8–10*

## TODAY IN THE WORD



During a trip to Algiers, the British statesman Lord Frederick North asked his host if he might be permitted to see one of the women of his harem. Instead of being offended by the request, the host took one look at Lord North and told the keeper of the harem, “He is so ugly, let him see them all!”

In today’s passage the groom compares his bride to the women of a harem. It was not unusual in Solomon’s day for kings to have harems of many wives and concubines. Political reasons motivated many multiple marriages.

Concubines, on the other hand, were granted a different status. They had more rights than an ordinary slave, but far fewer than a wife. Their function was primarily to bear children and care for the king’s palace (2 Sam. 15:16; 16:21).

According to Scripture, King David had multiple wives and several concubines (2 Sam. 19:5). Solomon had a total of seven hundred wives of royal birth and three hundred concubines (1 Kings 11:3). The numbers of wives and concubines listed in our reading today are substantially lower. It may be that this was written early in Solomon’s reign, before he had acquired his enormous harem.

When compared to all other women, the bride stands out. Solomon describes her as “unique” (v. 9). The Hebrew

text literally says that she is “one.” Solomon also calls her “my perfect one.” The Hebrew term conveys something pure and chosen. She is like a beautiful gem that is both rare and flawless. Today we might paraphrase the comparison by saying that she is “one in a million.”

Others share Solomon’s opinion. Not surprisingly, she is her mother’s favorite. The maidens, perhaps a reference to the other women of the harem or to other ladies of the court, call her “blessed.” They may be the ones who ask the question in verse 10. Even though we may not know exactly who speaks this question, it underscores the matchless beauty of the bride.

## TODAY ALONG THE WAY



One secret to nurturing a love relationship is to recognize the uniqueness of the other person. This comes naturally during the beginning of a relationship. In time these will seem commonplace. If the relationship is to grow into a mature love, we will need to learn to look more deeply to discover what makes that person “one in a million.”

This is true whether the relationship is a friendship or a romance. Try making a list of unique things that you appreciate about someone you love.

*I have no one else like him.*

PHILIPPIANS 2:20



## TODAY AT MOODY

We appreciate the faithful service of Robert Gunter, Vice President and General Counsel at Moody. Please uphold him and his Executive Secretary, Cassandra Blakely, in prayer today.

*Love is kind.*

1 CORINTHIANS 13:4



## TODAY AT MOODY

Bruce Cain, Vice President of Facilities Management, leads a hard-working team that takes good care of our campus. And today, as they go about their various tasks, they will be glad to know you're praying for them.

*Read: Song of Solomon 6:11–15*

## TODAY IN THE WORD



The old hymn “In the Garden” begins, “I come to the garden alone, while the dew is still on the roses.” In it, hymnwriter Charles Austin Miles describes an intimate encounter with Jesus. Miles described his time spent in prayer this way: “And he walks with me, and he talks with me, and he tells me I am his own; and the joy we share as we tarry there, none other has ever known.”

Poets have often used the image of a garden to convey a sense of beauty and even intimacy, and we have seen this image throughout the Song of Solomon. Verse 11 describes a visit to a grove of nut trees. This could refer to a literal visit to a real garden, or it could be figurative language meant to speak of the blossoming of love. It is unclear who is doing the speaking; the context does not clearly indicate whether it is Solomon or his bride.

The translation is also extremely difficult (the KJV, NIV, and NASB each translate verse 12 differently). After the speaker’s visit to the garden, the speaker arrives among the chariots. Although the Hebrew text is very obscure, many Bible scholars believe that the bride is speaking. It may indicate that she stumbled upon a royal procession during her visit to the nut grove. Another possibility is that the groom placed the bride among the chariots.

These verses paint a very romantic picture. It is one in which the bride is swept off her feet and carried away by her lover. Not only is she by his side once more, she has been elevated to her rightful status as queen.

Whether the bride stumbles upon Solomon’s procession by accident or is placed in the chariot by Solomon himself, the result is the same. She is surprised by love. This ought to be our goal as well: to make it our mission to show love in unexpected ways to those around us. This is the principle of Philippians 2:4, which urges: “Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.”

## TODAY ALONG THE WAY



You do not need to “sweep someone off their feet” in order to show them love. You do not even need a chariot. One of the best ways to demonstrate unexpected love to others is by performing random acts of kindness. Think of something you can do for someone else without drawing attention to yourself. It does not have to be elaborate to be meaningful. Simply giving a cold cup of water to one who is thirsty is enough to warrant a reward from your Father in heaven (Mark 9:41).

*Read: Song of Solomon 7:1–10*

## TODAY IN THE WORD



The popular television show *Sex and the City* portrayed the glamorous love

life of single women living in New York. One of the stars, Kim Cattrall, noted that the images in the program are unrealistic. “It’s much more fun being single on *Sex and the City* than it is in real life,” she observed.

Scientific research supports Cattrall. Recent studies show that married people enjoy sex more than sexually active singles, and that they even have sex more frequently. The media image of the carefree sex life of the swinging single is a myth. This should come as no surprise to Christians. The Bible teaches that the marriage relationship is the only appropriate context for sexual expression.

In today’s passage, Solomon praises the physical beauty of his bride. His imagery describes her from her feet to her head (in that order). Solomon speaks so frankly that his words have embarrassed people throughout history. In order to avoid this sexual imagery, the church has often tried to interpret this passage in purely spiritual terms. If we did not already know that this was inspired Scripture, we might wonder if this passage truly belonged in the Bible.

The emphasis in these verses is proof that the physical dimension of the marriage relationship is important. The New Testament confirms this when it commands husbands and wives

not to withhold sex from one another (1 Cor. 7:3–5).

Nevertheless, it is equally important to recognize that although sex is important in the marriage relationship, it is not our most important need. Henri Nouwen has written, “Your body needs to be held and to hold, to be touched and to touch. None of these needs is to be despised, denied, or repressed. But you have to keep searching for your body’s deeper need, the need for genuine love.”

Married couples should not be ashamed of sex. It is a gift from God. Yet its deepest pleasure is only a pale reflection of the delight we will experience in God’s presence. We can enjoy sex—but ultimately it is God’s love that we need.

## TODAY ALONG THE WAY



Sexual desire is part of our human nature. So is the capacity to enjoy physical beauty. They are also a stewardship entrusted to us by God. Read Jesus’ warning in Matthew 5:28–30. Why do you think He uses such strong language? According to 1 Thessalonians 4:3–9, what are some of the consequences of not controlling our bodies? What does it mean for you to control your body in a way that is holy and honorable today? Ask God to produce the spiritual fruit of self-control in your life today.

*The man and his wife . . . felt no shame.*

GENESIS 2:25



## TODAY AT MOODY

Today, please join us in prayer for the MBI President, Dr. Joseph Stowell, as he speaks at the Christian Booksellers Association conference in Atlanta, Georgia. We ask for safe travel and strength from the Lord in Dr. Stowell’s busy schedule.

## *Flee from sexual immorality.*

1 CORINTHIANS 6:18



### TODAY AT MOODY

The staff of our Enrollment Management department follows the progress of our students from their first day at Moody to graduation. You can support with your prayers today these employees from Admissions: Marthe Campa, Michael Crumpler, and Mark Gamez.

*Read: Song of Solomon 7:11–15*

### TODAY IN THE WORD



In a *Christianity Today* article entitled, “Losing Our Promiscuity,” author

Paula Rinehart quoted a woman in her twenties with a history of sexual promiscuity. “I wish I hadn’t given so much of myself,” she lamented. “I feel that some of my experiences thinned my soul, and such an effect takes time to undo.”

One of the many tragic side effects of a promiscuous lifestyle is that it can lead to sexual boredom in the marriage relationship. Ironically, the notion that marriage makes sex boring is one of the myths used to justify a promiscuous lifestyle. In a healthy marriage the opposite is true. As the relationship deepens, so does the couple’s enjoyment of the physical dimension of their marriage.

Today’s passage continues the Song of Solomon’s celebration of sexual love within the context of marriage. The bride promises to give her love to her groom. She declares, “At our door is every delicacy, both new and old, that I have stored up for you, my lover” (v. 13). This beautiful image depicts sexual love as something rare that has been saved for the bride’s husband alone. It is a cherished treasure, hidden away until the proper time.

The bride’s imagery also suggests that those in a healthy marriage should expect the pleasures of physical intimacy to increase rather than decrease with time. She promises to give

her husband choice delicacies “both new and old.” If marriage leads to sexual boredom, it is not the institution but the nature of the couple’s relationship that is flawed.

Sexual pleasure should never be squandered. God did not intend for us to share this gift with many. Instead, like Solomon’s bride, it is something to be protected until it can be offered as a gift to the one for whom it was originally intended.

Our society approaches sex as if it were fast food. Solomon’s bride understood that it is a rare delicacy. Moral purity enhances physical intimacy within marriage. It allows a married couple to explore the delights of the garden of love without feeling the restraint of past guilt.

### TODAY ALONG THE WAY



Scripture warns us to flee sexual immorality (1 Cor. 6:18) and that immoral

behavior is inconsistent with the profession of godliness (Eph. 5:3). Thankfully, God also promises forgiveness and cleansing to those who confess their sin—no matter what it may be (1 John 1:9). We cannot undo past decisions, but we can be made new through Jesus Christ. If you have succumbed to sexual temptation, embrace the forgiveness found in Christ and ask the Holy Spirit to give you renewed strength to glorify God through your body.

*Read: Song of Solomon 8:1–4*

## TODAY IN THE WORD



An anonymous humorist defined the honeymoon as “a short period of

doting between dating and debting.” Honeymoons may be short, but few are as short as Carla Dunford’s. According to a British newspaper, Dunford left her husband Pete for Chris Herbert after she had been married for less than three weeks. Her husband was away on a trip when she met her new love interest.

“He’d only been gone a couple of days,” Carla said, “when I walked into the newsagent’s and there was this gorgeous man there. It was Chris, although all I knew at the time was that he was young, smart, good-looking and sexy.” Claiming “love at first sight,” Dunford announced her decision to end the marriage when her husband returned home.

The phrase “the honeymoon is over” implies that the initial fire of romance will diminish over time. To some extent this is true. The nature of the love relationship changes—but it does not have to grow cold. In our passage today, the bride longed to see the passion they experienced during their honeymoon continue into the marriage.

Her wish that the groom would be like a brother who had been nursed at her mother’s breasts probably sounds a little strange to modern ears, if not perverse. It must be understood in light of ancient Hebrew culture, where it was unusual for a

husband and wife to show affection to one another in public. If he were her brother, however, she could embrace him publicly without stigma.

Technically, she does not say that she wishes that her groom were actually her brother, but rather that he would be to her “like” a brother. This simile is used in the New Testament to characterize the relationship between men and women in the church. As we see in today’s verse, Paul urged Timothy to treat the women in the church with the same respect found in family relationships.

Purity and passion are both important to the marriage relationship. Couples who are born again are brothers and sisters in Christ as well as partners in marriage. Once they lose sight of the obligations they owe one another in Christ, the honeymoon really is over.

## TODAY ALONG THE WAY



If you are a married person, why not plan a “honeymoon” weekend with your spouse? If you cannot afford to get away for the weekend, plan a romantic dinner at home.

During your time together discuss the steps you might need to take to keep the passion alive in your marriage. Each of you may want to answer some of the following questions: When do you feel most loved by your partner? How would you define a “romantic” evening? What goals would you set for your marriage for the next year?

*[Treat] older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters, with absolute purity.*

1 TIMOTHY 5:2



## TODAY AT MOODY

Please continue to uplift in prayer the Admissions staff of the Enrollment Management department: Jacqueline Holman, Annette Moy, and Jamie Stowell. Thank the Lord for everything they do in the service of our students.

*Anger is  
cruel and fury  
overwhelm-  
ing, but who  
can stand  
before jeal-  
ousy?*

PROVERBS 27:4



#### TODAY AT MOODY

We ask that you encourage with your prayers our Vice President of Broadcasting, Robert Neff. Ask the Lord to bless his ministry at Moody and to give him wisdom in making decisions and strength in facing everyday challenges.

*Read: Song of Solomon 8:5–9*

#### TODAY IN THE WORD



An old song says, “Don’t sit under the apple tree with anyone else but me.”

The bride might have sung the same words. Today’s passage describes the couple’s return to an ancestral home, although we aren’t given more details in the text.

People marvel at the sight of the bride, who appears “coming up from the desert leaning on her lover” (v. 5). This may suggest that she was pregnant with their first child, and they are returning home for the birth.

The imagery the bride uses as she speaks to the groom emphasizes the importance of commitment and the power of love. For example, she asks him to place her like a “seal” over his heart. Seals were often made of gold or precious gems and were given as a pledge. They were used to signify ownership and right of access. Even today, wedding rings are given and worn as a kind of “seal.” They symbolize the wearer’s obligation to be faithful to the one they have wed.

The bride’s call to faithfulness is accompanied by a warning about jealousy. This is not a petty reminder. It is true that there are times when jealousy is a sin. Christians are warned not to act in “dissension and jealousy” (Rom. 13:13). Jealousy is one of the works of the flesh listed in Galatians 5:20. But jealousy is also an attribute of God. He is a “jealous” God (Ex. 20:5; 34:14). In His case, jealousy is

appropriate. God alone deserves our worship.

In some contexts human jealousy is also an appropriate response. Jealousy arouses a husband’s fury and sparks a desire for justice (Prov. 6:34). Old Testament scholar Derek Kidner calls this kind of jealousy, “a proper intolerance of disruptive intrusion.” He notes that it is actually a mark of love.

A spouse whose partner has been unfaithful will inevitably feel jealous. Once the marriage vows have been broken, it takes time before trust can be restored. Jealousy, whether legitimate or illegitimate, does not give way easily.

#### TODAY ALONG THE WAY



What makes you feel jealous? Make a list. Next to each item write either the letter “A” (for appropriate) or “I” (for inappropriate). If you have items marked “A” on your list, consider prayerfully discussing them with the one who is the cause. Your feelings may be a sign of a more serious problem in the relationship. If you have items marked “I” on your list, ask God to replace your jealousy with the appropriate fruit of the Spirit. If you are unsure whether your feelings are appropriate or inappropriate, consider discussing them with your pastor or a Christian counselor.

*Read: Song of Solomon 8:5-9*

TODAY IN THE WORD



“We are all made for marriage, as our bodies show and the Scriptures state,”

Martin Luther noted. On this point, however, Luther was wrong. Scripture does not actually say that we are all made for marriage. Jesus taught that being married and being single were both callings from God. While some marry, others have been called to be single for the sake of the kingdom of God.

Likewise, the apostle Paul pointed out that single people enjoy certain advantages when it comes to serving God. They have the potential to minister without the distractions of married life. The determining factor is a matter of divine purpose for the individual. Paul favored the single life because of his own personal experience; he admitted that “each man has his own gift from God; one has this gift, another has that” (1 Cor. 7:7).

Paul also recognized that one’s marital state is also a matter of choice. When he was asked by a group of singles in the Corinthian church whether it was appropriate for them to marry, Paul left the decision up to them (1 Cor. 7:25-28). They had the freedom to marry whomever they pleased, as long as they married another believer (cf. 1 Cor. 7:39).

In today’s reading the bride speaks of a similar freedom. She compares what she has to offer with the vineyard in Baal-hamon that Solomon already possesses. Just as

Solomon had the right to let his vineyard out to tenants, she has the right to give herself to the one she chooses. The Song of Solomon concludes with her offering herself to the one she loves, as a treasure unequalled.

This is the kind of love God ordained for the marriage relationship. It is a gift that cannot be earned and is not deserved. No amount of money can compensate for its loss. It should be no surprise, then, that marriage reflects the relationship between Christ and the church (Eph. 5:32). The heavenly bride of Christ is Christ’s treasure (Eph. 1:18). Christ loved the church so much that He “gave himself up for her” (Eph. 5:25).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY



During the wedding ceremony both husband and wife are asked to make a commitment. In a sense, the same is true of the believer’s relationship with Christ. Jesus has already spoken His vows. He has promised to receive all who come to Him in faith (John 6:37). He sealed this vow by offering Himself on the cross as a payment for sin. All that remains is for us to respond.

Have you committed yourself to the one who gave Himself for you? If not, He is still waiting to hear you say, “I do.”

*Christ loved  
the church  
and gave  
himself up  
for her.*

EPHESIANS 5:25



TODAY AT MOODY

In conclusion of this study on love, we’d like to thank you, members of the Moody family, who have demonstrated the love of Christ to Moody Bible Institute through your faithful prayers, generosity, and friendship. “Love never fails” (1 Cor. 13:8).



*I give thanks that God placed your program in my life. These messages on forgiveness have touched my life at the time I was desperately looking. I have printed copies and will use them frequently to remind me of the four keys to forgiveness. I pray your program continues to touch other lives as it has touched mine. I look forward to learning and growing more with Proclaim! Thank you and God Bless!*

NIKKI

the Internet. The 15-minute show airs five days a week via the Moody Broadcasting Network and features a dynamic mix of teaching, drama, music, and interviews—all geared toward developing fully devoted followers of Christ.

“The method, whether we use drama or music or other bits, isn’t really as important as whether or not by the end of the day the listener is drawn closer to Christ,” said *Proclaim!* managing producer Joe Carlson.

Carlson, who has been working on *Proclaim!* since it first aired eight years ago, confesses that a lot of work goes into each 15-minute show. “It usually starts with me recording Dr. Stowell preaching, either here on campus at chapel or on location somewhere else. While he’s talking I’ll listen and note where we might insert a cool drama, amplify one of his points with a song, or interview someone on this topic. When it’s over, I’ll load the recording into our computer. Since I’m always working on several things at one time, it’s usually a while before I get back to any given recording, but when I do I pull back out the notes I took and I start dividing the recording into segments, looking for program introduction and that sort of thing,” he explained.

“Once I’ve edited the program together with any bits we’re going to use, Dr. Stowell and Wayne come together in the studio to record their dialogue. This is the connective glue that holds the show together, especially when we’re in the middle of a

series that spreads out over several days. Dr. Stowell and Wayne can remind listeners of what they heard over the last couple of days to provide context for the current day's show. And it also gives Dr. Stowell an opportunity to build rapport with listeners, to let them in on what's going on in his life."

After the dialogue is taped, Carlson times the show and burns it to a disc so it can be sent out on the network. "Honestly, if it weren't for our digital recording studio, it would be practically impossible to put this show together."

*Proclaim!* has been so successful that many radio shows now mimic its mix of teaching, drama, music, and dialogue. Bringing together all these elements in one show is what Carlson loved about working on *Proclaim!* in the early days. But now he says that the pieces of the show aren't what is most exciting. "Lots of people do drama, music, little extras," he said. "What's cool is Christ. We get the pleasure of seeing Him use us through *Proclaim!*, and I can't think of a better way to spend my time." ■

To learn when you can hear  
*Proclaim!* in your area, call  
1-800-DL MOODY  
or visit [www.mbn.org](http://www.mbn.org).

*I listen to Proclaim! every morning on my way to school as an inner city middle school teacher. Dr. Stowell, your message is just what I need to hear as I struggle to be a Christian who will bring God glory and honor by my actions and words. On Thursday, March 4, I had a hard day at school filled with student conflicts, disobedience, and disrespect. I was angry and determined to make my students pay for this when I got to school Friday morning. Every parent was called and during my sleepless night, I plotted my disciplinary methods. I literally cried when I heard your message on grace Friday morning. No, my students didn't deserve kindness, love, and understanding, BUT neither do I! You reminded me that if I am to be known as a Christian I must do everything in my power to be like Jesus. My plan totally changed, and the quiet message of obedience and love I gave to my students gave me a day of peace and kind reactions from my students. This is not the first time your message has softened my approach to the problems we face as teachers in today's hostile world.*

*Thank you for sharing God's word in such a wonderful way!*

*In Christ,*

ELLEN

# What kind of plans have you made?

Will your estate  
plan avoid probate  
with its delays,  
attorney's fees, and  
court costs?



If your current estate plan is a will, you may be leaving probate costs and delays to your family. A revocable living trust is an option you may want to consider. A properly drafted and funded living trust avoids probate expenses, delays, and publicity. It also can provide a management plan if you were ever to become disabled. A living trust is a way to leave an important legacy to family and ministries.

If you would like to learn more about the revocable living trust, then you should request your FREE copy of Moody Bible Institute's *Legacy to the World* brochure, which presents an easy-to-understand overview of the revocable living trust. Learning more about how the revocable living trust works can help you determine if the living trust is right for your estate planning. Simply check the box on the attached reader reply panel, or call us at 1-800-DL MOODY (356-6639) and ask for *Legacy to the World*.



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