The Most Beautiful Bride

Teaching Tips

January 10, 2016

Bible Study Guide 6

Words You Should Know

A. Undefiled (Song of Solomon 6:9) tam (Heb.)—Perfect, complete, simple, innocent, gentle.

B. Soul (v. 12) nefesh (Heb.)—Vitality, being, will, desire.

Teacher Preparation

Unifying Principle—The Eye of the Beholder. When marriages are grounded in love, couples view each other primarily with adoration. How can someone adequately describe the beauty of someone they love dearly? The writer of the Song of Solomon eloquently describes mutual adoration for the matchless inner and outer beauty of one another.

A. Pray for your students making particular note of various ages and life stages of your class if applicable.

B. Study the entire book of the Song of Solomon, noting the movement of the text as the speaker changes and create an outline noting who is the speaker.

C. Read through In Depth and More Light on the Text to help formulate the direction of the lesson.

O—Open the Lesson

A. Start with prayer and make sure you understand the segments of your class (i.e., married, single, divorced, widowed, young, seasoned). Pray for any special needs as you approach today’s lesson.

B. Have students share their thoughts about the In Focus story and what they hope to get out of today’s lesson based on the Aim for Change.

P—Present the Scriptures

A. Ask for volunteers to read the Focal Verses.

B. Ask volunteers to read The People, Places, and Times; Background; and In Depth sections.

E—Explore the Meaning

A. Answer questions from the Search the Scriptures and Discuss the Meaning sections.

B. Read the Lesson in Our Society section.

N—Next Steps for Application
A. Read the Make It Happen section and discuss with the class how to apply it to their lives.

B. Summarize and close in prayer thanking God for blessing us all with internal and external beauty.

Worship Guide

For the Superintendent or Teacher

Theme: The Most Beautiful Bride

Song: “I Found Love (Cindy’s Song)”

Devotional Reading: John 10:7–15

Bible Background • SONG OF SOLOMON 6

Printed Text • SONG OF SOLOMON 6:4–12 | Devotional Reading • JOHN 10:7–15

Aim for Change

By the end of this lesson, we will: EXPLORE love and adoration as pictured in the Song of Solomon; REFLECT on romantic relationships and the ways to nurture them; and SEEK ways to recognize and express appreciation, in appropriate ways, for inner and physical beauty in others.

In Focus

Greg was spellbound as his bride walked down the aisle. He had dated a lot of women before, but when he met Alicia, she instantly captured his heart and he was ready to settle down. Alicia was a true beauty inside and out. They met online as a part of a Christian social media community. She would always have profound things to say that resonated with his spirit. The local community organized meetups and Greg made sure that he was able to connect with Alicia at these events. Greg finally got the nerve to ask her out on a date and she said yes. Little did he know Alicia had been watching him too. She prayed and sought the Lord to help her manage her emotions. When Greg finally asked her out, she was ecstatic. The other women in the community were jealous and began to discourage Alicia, telling her there is no way he was that into her—so many women vie for his attention, and besides, he was a known player. Alicia placed her confidence in God, and when Greg asked to date her exclusively, she knew the Lord answered her prayers. Six months later, when Greg proposed on a beautiful summer evening, he had it all planned to the detail and involved her family. Now they were both overwhelmed with joy that their moment had arrived and they could not wait to get alone.

True love is expressive and unashamed. What are some other qualities of true love?

Keep in Mind

“My dove, my undefiled is but one; she is the only one of her mother, she is the choice one of her that bare her. The daughters saw her, and blessed her; yea, the queens and the concubines, and they praised her” (Song of Solomon 6:9).

Focal Verses
Song of Solomon 6:4 Thou art beautiful, O my love, as Tirzah, comely as Jerusalem, terrible as an army with banners.

5 Turn away thine eyes from me, for they have overcome me: thy hair is as a flock of goats that appear from Gilead.

6 Thy teeth are as a flock of sheep which go up from the washing, whereof every one beareth twins, and there is not one barren among them.

7 As a piece of a pomegranate are thy temples within thy locks.

8 There are threescore queens, and fourscore concubines, and virgins without number.

9 My dove, my undefiled is but one; she is the only one of her mother, she is the choice one of her that bare her. The daughters saw her, and blessed her; yea, the queens and the concubines, and they praised her.

10 Who is she that looketh forth as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners?

11 I went down into the garden of nuts to see the fruits of the valley, and to see whether the vine flourished and the pomegranates budded.

12 Or ever I was aware, my soul made me like the chariots of Amminadib.

The People, Places, and Times

Tirzah. A city located in the northern part of Solomon's kingdom and residence of at least two kings thereafter; its name means “true beauty and delight.” This Canaanite city was conquered by Joshua (Joshua 12:7, 24) and represented all that was beautiful in royal splendor.

Concubines. A woman who was a secondary wife. A man was legally allowed to have sexual relations with her
and bound to materially provide for her and any children conceived from this relationship. The children had no rights of inheritance unless the father declared it so. The custom of women becoming concubines grew out of the ancient Near Eastern desire to produce children, and if a man’s first wife could not do this, then he took on a second wife or concubine for this purpose. In time, kings would gather many concubines in a royal harem as a symbol of their manhood and power.

**Shulamite Woman.** The female lover in the Song of Solomon is known as the Shulamite woman. She describes herself as “black and beautiful” (cf. *Song of Solomon 1:5–6, NRSV*). Some argue that she uses this language to denote her sun-darkened skin; others believe her description points toward her African ancestry. This view can be supported by the way she describes herself as black as the tents of Kedar. This is a reference to tents made from the jet black hair of goats.

**Background**

Song of Solomon, also called “Song of Songs,” is grouped with the poetic books of the Bible. It is believed to be an exchange between David’s son Solomon during his reign and the Shulamite woman who captured his heart, along with a chorus of palace women called “daughters of Jerusalem.” It is well documented that Solomon had a harem of more than 1,000 women comprised of 700 wives and 300 concubines at the height of his kingdom (*1 Kings 11:3*), but it is amazing that the Shulamite bride stood out among them to be celebrated in this fashion. This collection of poetry or songs showcases the drama and passion of human love. Jewish and Christian scholars have interpreted the allegorical meanings to God’s fierce love for Israel, as well as the Church as the ravishing bride of Christ.

**At-A-Glance**

1. Complimenting Beauty (*Song of Solomon 6:4–7*)
2. Convinced by Beauty (vv. 8–10)
3. Captivated by Beauty (vv. 11–12)

**In Depth**

1. **Complimenting Beauty** (*Song of Solomon 6:4–7*)

   Earlier (*Song of Solomon 5:10–16*), the bride recalls her love for her king and anticipation of his presence. In response to her love, Solomon uses rich language to express his love for the Shulamite woman as he depicts the uniqueness of her beauty. He uses two cities to capture the splendor of her glory. Tirzah was an ancient Canaanite city captured by Joshua and known for its beautiful location on a hill. Jerusalem, the capital of the Southern Kingdom, was also on a hill and was a treasure of Jewish heritage and significance. The king as a lover sings of the majesty of his bride: she is dignified, worthy of his attention, and he stands in awe of her appearance such that she penetrates his very soul. Common in poetry of this age in the Eastern tradition, he uses familiar metaphors to paint a picture of the power of her presence. A woman’s beauty is to be celebrated and a man does well to shower the woman he loves with words of affirmation.

2. **Convinced by Beauty (vv. 8–10)**

   Solomon calls his bride his “dove” and “undefiled,” or perfect, one and special among her mother’s daughters. His bride is honorable in his eyes. Other women cannot help but praise her, because she is precious in his sight. The women in Solomon’s harem act as the chorus to this piece of the poetry. The sun and the moon depict her beauty and brightness. She is described as majestic as an army with banners, which echoes the king’s language (v. 4).

   In this loving tribute, the Shulamite woman is the epitome of a virtuous woman worthy of honor from her king, her
spouse, and he is uninhibited in his love for her. The language used here shows the Shulamite as unique in the king’s eyes. This is an example of how all spouses should be seen in each other’s eyes. We need to have eyes for only our spouse and be convinced of their beauty above all others.

3. Captivated by Beauty (vv. 11–12)

The woman goes to her garden to check on the new spring growth. This is symbolic of how the love she has for him has been renewed. The rich imagery of fruit and grapes from the vine would impact the poem’s reader in numerous ways. A garden filled with budding fruit trees would evoke images of lushness, and also remind them of pleasant fragrances.

As the Shulamite’s love is renewed, she is overwhelmed. She is transported into the royal chariots. The emotion communicated is excitement and joy. This is descriptive of mature marital love as joy and excitement continue to be renewed. We should seek to be full of joy and delight over our spouse even as our relationship with them matures over the years. Due to our spouse’s uniqueness in our own eyes, our love for them should never fade away but be renewed throughout the different seasons of marriage.

Search the Scriptures

1. What two cities does the king use to compare the beauty of his bride (Song of Solomon 6:4)?

2. Who joins the king in praise of his bride (vv. 9–10)?

Discuss the Meaning

1. What does it mean to have a spouse or significant other who express their feelings? Is it necessary for the health of the relationship?

2. What can we learn about love from Solomon and his bride, the Shulamite woman?

Lesson in Our Society

We know that God is love, but people often shy away from talking about God’s expression of love in a marital relationship via sexual intimacy. The reason sex in the confines of marriage is beautiful is that it is the expression of love, commitment, and connectedness between two people who have gone before Him and pledged to love one another for life.

As Christians, we can provide examples of godly love between a man and a woman. Marital love is symbolic of God’s love for His people. We can also impact our culture by supporting Christian media and calling for the end of inappropriate sexual images and song lyrics that demean and objectify the opposite sex. We can also celebrate the unique beauty of our spouse and resist the world’s false standard of beauty.

There is nothing wrong with sexual desire, as it is God’s design for humanity. He also designed it to be expressed within the boundaries of marriage. This is for His glory, as through marriage we imitate His covenant relationship with His people. It is also for our good, as our greatest joy and fulfillment in romantic relationships can be found in the institution of marriage.

Make It Happen

Romance is never out of style. If you are married, take turns in planning a special date night for your mate. Pray and study your mate, seeking to meet their deepest desires, even if it requires coming out of your comfort zone. Dating doesn’t end once you’re married. Nurture your relationship with one another; most importantly, accept one another and be quick to forgive. If you are single and dating, be sure to have open and honest conversations to ensure the twc
of you are on the same page in your relationship; be sure to involve others to help you remain accountable. Be sure to have fun and enjoy the journey with planned dates that honor God. If you are single and not dating but would like to at some point, connect with like-minded friends who can help you focus on the things of God and join in prayer with you over discerning God’s timing to date.

**Follow the Spirit**

What God wants me to do.

**Remember Your Thoughts**

Special insights I have learned.

**More Light on the Text**

**Song of Solomon 6:4–12**

4 Thou art beautiful, O my love, as Tirzah, comely as Jerusalem, terrible as an army with banners.

The Song of Solomon is a powerful love poem where two lovers, newlyweds by some accounts, sing of their mutual love and unrestrained passion for one another. Song of Solomon 6:4–7 is the second of two lengthy speeches by the male lover proclaiming his adoration for his beloved. The speaker uses a lyric device characteristic to Arabic poetry known as a wasf, which uses imagery from the natural world to praise the lover’s human physique, moving from one part of the body to the next (cf. 4:1–5, 6:5–7). Throughout the speech he likens her beauty to doves, sheep, and pomegranates, to name a few.

In verse 4, her loveliness is compared to the beautifully situated city of Tirzah in the tribal territory of Manasseh and the capital city Jerusalem in the Southern Kingdom of Judah. Both were fortified, bustling cities lavished with the ornamental trappings worthy of a royal city. Her beauty is compared in the King James Version to an army with banners (v. 10). As stunning as the sight of those banners is, her beauty is comparable in his eyes.

5 Turn away thine eyes from me, for they have overcome me: thy hair is as a flock of goats that appear from Gilead. 6 Thy teeth are as a flock of sheep which go up from the washing, whereof every one beareth twins, and there is not one barren among them.

The writer moves from a general exhortation of her overall beauty to extolling specific parts of her body. Her eyes, which he likened to doves in the first wasf (4:1), arouse in him anguish now. He objects that the look of love from her is too overwhelming for him to hold her gaze and he begs her to look away. The man repeats a compliment first stated in a previous chapter (4:1), that her hair is like a flock of goats on Mount Gilead. He is speaking metaphorically here, comparing her hair to the sight of goats descending the rolling hills, which might have appeared as a woman’s long, thick, wavy, black hair, the predominant color of goats in Syria-Palestine at that time.

In contrast to the black flock of goats are the white sheep, which the man compares to the woman’s teeth. Her teeth are characterized as clean, like the sheep coming up from the water and ready for shearing. Moreover, there is not a tooth missing in her mouth. Dental hygiene being what it was in antiquity, it was unusual to find someone with all his or her teeth. Although today’s women might be offended by being compared to sheep and goats, they could appreciate someone complimenting their smile.

7 As a piece of a pomegranate are thy temples within thy locks.

This verse omits the first half of the simile that is part of a couplet in the first wasf: “Thy lips are like a thread of scarlet, and thy speech is comely” (4:3). Perhaps the man did not believe that it needed repeating. The second part has proven difficult for many interpreters. The KJV compares her temple, or brow from the Hebrew raqqah (rak-KAH), to a
slice of pomegranate. The Hebrew word is translated temple in its other Old Testament uses (Judges 4:21, 5:26). However, in reference to her red lips in 4:3, her cheeks could just as likely be like halves of red pomegranates. Along with the word tsammah (tsam-MAH) translated “locks” in the KJV, but as “veil” in modern translations (cf. 4:1, 3; Isaiah 47:2), verse 7 should perhaps be translated, “Like a slice of pomegranate are your cheeks behind your veil.” Verse 7 ends this wasf.

8 There are threescore queens, and fourscore concubines, and virgins without number. 9 My dove, my undefiled is but one; she is the only one of her mother, she is the choice one of her that bare her. The daughters saw her, and blessed her; yea, the queens and the concubines, and they praised her. 10 Who is she that looketh forth as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners?

In verses 8 and 9, the writer returns to an earlier theme of royal imagery in the poem (cf. 3:6–11). The man proclaims that his beloved is second to none; not even the royal women of the court, no matter their numbers, can come close to the woman's splendor. In fact, these women of high social status praise this common woman. The man finds the woman so exceptional that he writes that among all her siblings, she is her mother’s favorite. Her sisters, like the royal ladies, find favor with her when they look upon and bless her. The man returns to the simile of the banners of the capital cities in verse 4 to inquire rhetorically, who is this woman who looks as awesome as the dawn, moon, and sun?

11 I went down into the garden of nuts to see the fruits of the valley, and to see whether the vine flourished and the pomegranates budded. 12 Or ever I was aware, my soul made me like the chariots of Amminadib.

Scholars agree that verses 11 and 12 are difficult to translate due to the corruption of the original Hebrew text. However, there is a general consensus that verse 11 is full of sexual innuendos. In ancient Palestine, walnuts, vines, and pomegranates held certain sexual significance. Having gone to the garden, the speaker, most likely the woman now, is caught unaware by some discovery. The KJV interprets the word ammi-nadib (Heb. am-ME nah-DEEV) as a proper name, Amminadib. However, nadib in Hebrew can mean “noble man” or “prince,” and ammi could be translated “my people,” together making a phrase instead of a name: “my noble people.” A better translation then might be that before she knew what was happening, her desire had “taken me to the chariot of a noble man” (NLT) or “had set me in a chariot of a noble man.” Perhaps she is so overwhelmed by the many sensual stimuli in the garden that she finds herself metaphorically swept off her feet into her lover’s chariot.

Say It Correctly

Amminadib. ah-min-ah-DEEB.
Tirzah. TEAR-zah.
Gilead. GILL-ee-ad.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

A Perfect Woman
(Proverbs 31:10–11, 20, 25–26)

TUESDAY

The Perfect Shepherd
(John 10:1–6)

WEDNESDAY
The Good Shepherd
(John 10:7–15)

THURSDAY

The Eternal Shepherd
(John 10:22–30)

FRIDAY

The Most Perfect Love
(Song of Solomon 4:9–15)

SATURDAY

The Most Handsome Groom
(Song of Solomon 5:9–16)

SUNDAY

The Most Beautiful Bride
(Song of Solomon 6:4–12)