



on the road with

Lisa Harper

WHAT EVERY GIRL WANTS

*a portrait of perfect love & intimacy
in the Song of Solomon*



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What Every Girl Wants

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How to Use the DVD

As you work your way through the book, you'll notice that certain questions have a DVD **DVD** symbol next to them. Whenever you see this symbol, pop in the enclosed DVD, cue up the right chapter, hit play, and see what the book club has to say about this portion of Scripture.

You can watch as you go—one chapter at a time—or make some microwave popcorn and watch the whole thing while relaxing on the couch!

We really hope you enjoy “eavesdropping” on our conversations about God—and we hope they prompt some lively discussions with your friends, too!

Lisa





Introduction

I had to visit the Department of Motor Vehicles recently to get a new license, and it was almost as enjoyable as my last root canal. I don't know how the DMV manages to hire the grouchiest employees in the universe . . . maybe bad attitudes are applauded in their employee handbook.

Anyway, I was greeted by a unibrowed government “hostess”—who seemed like the type of person that eats small children for breakfast—and ordered to “take a number.” After giving her a sheepish look, which I hope communicated my gratitude that she didn't wallop me, I timidly took B-151. Then I looked for the least grimy plastic chair to settle into among the other disgruntled citizens, whose posture belied the fact that they'd been camped out for quite some time.

My heart sank a little while later when that very same hostess announced that the computers were down. She paused dramatically for a moment and then declared (with a hint of masochistic delight) that they couldn't process our forms without the computers so we'd “just have to wait” until they could fix the technical glitch. Her declaration doomed us to several hours of bottom-numbing misery.

Many people—even “church” people—think studying the Bible is boring. That it provides the same sort of posterior



anesthesia as the DMV. Based on past experiences with bland teaching, someone else's bias, or simply a lack of exposure, a big chunk of our society caricatures the Bible as a dreary rulebook punctuated by "thees," "thous," and "begats." For inspiration, they would just as soon ponder the warning tags on their mattresses.

And that's the main reason the On the Road series was developed. This is the third book in a series designed to help people discover how interesting and relevant God's Word really is! We hope those who formerly balked at perusing divine literature will find themselves pleasantly surprised by the colorful imagery, captivating drama, and compelling promises. We also hope those who've been in a zillion Bible studies will be effectively reminded of what an amazing gift it is to interact with this life-changing text.

In *What Every Girl Wants*, we're going to visit a racy section of Scripture called the Song of Solomon or the Song of Songs. This biblical poetry makes soap opera plots pale by comparison. You might be shocked by the content of this Old Testament tale, and while you'll most certainly be encouraged, we're pretty sure you won't be bored!

Ultimately, we pray this supernatural story will help you have a clearer picture of who God is and how crazy He is about you.

Lisa





Passionately Pursued

IF GOD IS THE PURSUER, THE AGELESS ROMANCER, THE
LOVER, THEN THERE HAS TO BE A BELOVED, ONE WHO IS
THE PURSUED. THIS IS OUR ROLE IN THE STORY.

John Eldredge, The Sacred Romance



Several months ago a friend lectured me about the lack of direction in my romantic life. I think she was trying to say a lack of momentum. Or the lack of a pulse, since sometimes my dating life seems to be barely breathing. Anyway, she strongly encouraged me to join an online dating service. Sigh.

I thought, *So, it's come to this.*

I know finding the love of your life via an Internet connection is all the rage now—I've seen the advertisements featuring cute couples gazing at

each other adoringly, so it obviously worked for them. But it still seems a little awkward to me. Not as desperate as advertising on the side of a bus, but awkward nonetheless.

My friend argued that the main reason I was hesitant about collaborating with a high-tech matchmaker was my pride. And since pride has certainly been my downfall before, I was convicted. I thought, *Maybe she's right. Maybe I should just get over myself and give it a try.* So I paid for a three-month membership.

That was four months ago and let's just say I should have followed my initial instincts. Not that there was anything *really* bad about the experience, but online dating just doesn't fit my personality. I like meeting people face-to-face over a mocha at Starbucks rather than hunched over a laptop, responding to an e-mail. I like watching new friends laugh, hearing the inflection in their voice, seeing the color of their eyes. And I didn't find that kind of personal connection on a computer screen. Dates just don't seem very *real* when they're dependent on electrical outlets.

did you know?

The Song of Songs is commonly known as one of the **Poetical Books**, which also include the books of Job, Psalms, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes. Poetry does occur in several other Old Testament books (Moses' Song in Exodus 15, Deborah's Song in Judges 5, and Hannah's Song in 1 Samuel 2, to name a few), so the term **poetical book** is a bit of a misnomer. Thus, some Bible scholars prefer the terminology **Psalms and Wisdom** literature (and add the book of Lamentations to the grouping).¹

I want a real love relationship with real intimacy. Something I believe *every* girl wants.

The Song of Songs (often referred to as “The Song of Solomon”) is a colorful poem that stands out in biblical literature like white shoes after Labor Day. The lyrics are sometimes shockingly explicit—they seem more Danielle Steel than divine at first glance. Perhaps that’s why it’s missing from most Sunday school curriculums! And the most wonderfully scandalous thing about the Song of Songs is what it says about the kind of authentic intimacy we can have with God.

What mode of communication do you prefer to use with work or impersonal relationships: face-to-face, phone, or e-mail? Which do you prefer with friends and family? Explain your preference in each genre.

What Did He Just Say?

I went to college at Troy State University in Troy, Alabama, for my junior and senior years. The area was quite different from where I grew up in central Florida. Among other things, Troy wasn’t what you’d call metropolitan. It was a small, laid-back Southern town where people were quick to extend hospitality but pretty slow about everything else. Needless to say, the local music scene wasn’t exactly cutting edge. Therefore, when I went home on school breaks, I tried to pay attention to new radio

MORE INFO

“The Song of Songs” is a Hebrew idiom expressing the superlative, as in this is *the* song of all songs—the best, the most beautiful. That same Hebrew idiom is used in reference to the Holy-of-Holies (Exodus 26:33, *The Message*) and the King of kings and Lord of lords. It means the most excellent of all.²



hits so I could help my friends back in L.A.—lower Alabama—keep up with contemporary playlists.

During one school break, I heard a new pop song from a tiny musician with huge hair named Prince. Like Cher and Ghandi, he's one of those single-name people—although he went through a season where he wanted to be known as a symbol, not a name. Anyway, I thought his song was really cool, so I memorized a few lines in order to teach it to my sorority sisters back in Troy. It went something like this: *She wore a red, spherical dress. The kind you find in a secondhand store.* Or so I thought.

Within days of returning to school, I'd told most of the girls about this “great, new song by Prince” and shared the catchy lyrics. So we were proud to strut our stuff when the song finally made it to the Troy playlists. We pranced out onto the fraternity dance floor en masse and began to belt out, “She wore a red, spherical dress. . . .” until someone approached us and asked, “What were you just singing?” To which one of us, probably silly me, repeated the lyrics with panache. But I was quickly exposed as a musical moron when he explained that the words of the song were actually: *She wore a raspberry beret.*

What's your most embarrassing example of mangling a song lyric?

How Should We Peruse This Poem?

Before we start sifting through Solomon's Song, I need to warn you that some of the lyrics are difficult to understand. Therefore, we're going to take



just a moment to consider the best way to “hear”—or interpret—the language of this book.

There are numerous interpretive styles, and Bible scholars still debate which one is the best. I don’t want to get so technical as to encourage mental field trips, but I do want to briefly explain the various methods in order to justify the lens through which we’ll look at the Song.

Historically, four or five different approaches have been popular when it comes to interpreting this book.³ The first is purely *allegorical*, which is basically an extended metaphor. I don’t think this approach is valid, mainly because it essentially ignores the historicity (the actual historical details—real people and places) of the text.

Another interpretative style is that this book was written as a *drama*, casting Solomon as an ancient Shakespeare on marital relations. I don’t favor this method either because I think it marginalizes the text into a summer paperback. Something to thumb through for entertainment.

The most common method is the *natural* or *literal* interpretation, which argues that this Old Testament book is simply a poem, communicating the hopes, desires, disappointments, and reconciliation of two young lovers. This approach synthesizes the Song of Songs into a marriage primer of sorts. Something to encourage love and sexuality, like God’s version of the Kama Sutra.

Additional interpretive methods for the Song of Songs include the *mythical* or *cultic* approach, which links this Old

MORE INFO

A famous rabbinic sage—Saadia—once commented: “Know, my brother, that you will find great differences in interpretation of the Song of Songs. In truth they differ because the Song of Songs resembles locks to which the keys have been lost.”⁴



Testament book to the erotic literature of ancient fertility cults. And finally, there's the *typological* approach, which is derived from the Greek word *typos*, meaning a pattern or what is produced from a pattern. This style recognizes the validity of the Old Testament account, and then finds a parallel link—or pattern—in the New Testament.

Whew! That's a lot of information, isn't it? However, we're not going to use any of the above approaches in their strictest sense in this book, and I'll explain why in just a minute.

Who Wrote This Wild Stuff?

It's commonly assumed that Solomon—King David's wealthy and wise Old Testament son, who wrote most of Proverbs and possibly Ecclesiastes—was the author of the Song of Songs, although some biblical scholars debate this assumption. Evidently, there are several linguistic issues that cast doubt on sole Solomonic authorship. But none is so compelling that Solomon can be irrevocably dismissed as the author. And theologians do agree that Solomon was the central male character in this love song. So maybe he wrote this poem, or part of it, or maybe it was written in his honor. Either way, it chronicles an amazing tenth-century (BC) romance between Solomon and his "favorite" wife.⁵

MORE INFO

The Bible is a progressive revelation, inspired by God and written by the Holy Spirit over a span of around 1,400 years through the pens of some forty or so different authors. When authorship of a particular section of Scripture is indefinite, theologians encourage readers to focus on the content of the text versus who was God's "scribe."



Just in case you flinched when reading that last sentence, it's important to remember that Solomon

lived during a time period when polygamy was the norm, especially for the rulers and chieftains. You'd probably be hard-pressed to find someone who embraces polygamy among your current circle of friends—unless you live in certain parts of Utah—but having more than one wife wasn't anything to write home about in this ancient era (although Solomon's harem might've prompted a postcard or two because he was such an enthusiastic wife collector). Scripture says he had seven hundred wives, as well as three hundred concubines (1 Kings 11:3). That's a lot of estrogen at one address! The Bible also tells us it got Solomon in a heap of trouble:

MORE INFO

For a detailed biography covering the colorful personal life and illustrious accomplishments of King Solomon, read 1 Kings 2–11 or 2 Chronicles 1–9.

For when Solomon was old his wives turned away his heart after other gods, and his heart was not wholly true to the LORD his God, as was the heart of David his father. 1 Kings 11:4

But please don't assume he was some lecherous millionaire, because for most of his life he was a godly man and a good king. Furthermore, it's a widely held belief (especially in the Jewish rabbinic tradition) that the Song was written when Solomon was a young man and celebrates the true "love of his life," or at least, the first girl who really captured his heart.⁶

Who was the first person you developed a crush on in elementary school? Did it ever sprout into a relationship?



What's Up with You?

Now by this point, some of you are probably asking yourself, *Why is she writing a book on the Song of Songs?* Which is a legitimate question. Why would a single girl like me, with a checkered dating past—basically a Bridget Jones among Bible thumpers—choose to write a book about the most romantic, erotically charged section of Scripture? The argument could be made that I'm like someone on the Atkins diet who can't have donuts, but gets a weird charge out of pressing her nose to the window at the Krispy Kreme place and watching them go through the glazing machine.

MORE INFO

Some Bible scholars think the Song of Songs is not actually one poem, but an anthology, or collection, of love poetry.⁷ Others argue for the structural unity and see the poetic divisions as distinctive sections similar to a prologue, individual "chapters," and an epilogue.⁸



But I prefer to think of myself as kind of a Bible tour guide, and my purpose in writing about the Song is to introduce people to the encouraging truths found in this amazing poem! Because the treasures in Solomon's words are for *everyone*—men, women, single, married, widowed, black, white, red, or purple—who yearns to connect with God through an intimate relationship with Jesus. And while it would be ignorant of me to claim that romance and marriage aren't the central themes in the Song, I do think a more inclusive yet still theologically responsible way to interpret this book is a *Christocentric*, or Christ-centered approach—looking at key passages and considering how they *illustrate* our walk of faith.

Because at some level, this eye-popping poetry points to our relationship with God. Jesus Himself said so in the Gospel of Luke:

That very day two of them were going to a village named Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and they were talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing together, Jesus himself drew near and went with them. But their eyes were kept from recognizing him. And he said to them, "What is this conversation that you are holding with each other as you walk?" And they stood still, looking sad. Then one of them, named Cleopas, answered him, "Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?" And he said to them, "What things?" And they said to him, "Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, a man who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and rulers delivered him up to be condemned to death, and crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things happened. Moreover, some women of our company amazed us. They were at the tomb early in the morning, and when they did not find his body, they came back saying that they had even seen a vision of angels, who said that he was alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see." And he said to them, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" And beginning with Moses and

all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.

Luke 24:13-27

These two guys are walking home from the very first Easter week in Jerusalem, kicking at pebbles in the road because they don't really understand what happened. They're depressed that the political-religious system conspired against a "good man." And that this man, named Jesus, died an unfair death. But then Jesus Himself—whom they don't yet recognize—walks up beside them and asks, in effect, "Why the long faces, guys?" They look at Him in disbelief like, "You've got to be kidding!" because they're shocked that this stranger doesn't know what just transpired in Jerusalem. Everybody is talking about it. It's front-page news in *Israel Today*. Has this man been living under a rock or something? So they explain, probably with exasperation or condescension, the events that have taken place.

Jesus listens to their entire spiel, then says something like this—and I picture Him with a hint of a smile here—"Don't you remember? We studied this in Old Testament 101; the prophets told us this would happen!" He continues by patiently reviewing God's merciful plan to redeem mankind through His death and resurrection, which they have just witnessed. Starting the lesson in Genesis and continuing through the prophets, *he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself*. In other words, Jesus takes these two bewildered men on a comprehensive Old Testa-



ment tour in order to say, “All of this points to the Messiah . . . it’s all about Me!”

Read Isaiah 53. What do you think this Old Testament passage says about Jesus?

Dr. John Murray, a respected theologian and professor, made this observation regarding Christ and the Song:

I also think that in terms of the biblical analogy the Song could be used to illustrate the relation to Christ and His church. The marriage bond is used in Scripture as a pattern of Christ and the church. If the Song portrays marital love and relationship on the highest levels of exercise and devotion, then surely it may be used to exemplify what is transcendently true in the bond that exists between Christ and the church.⁹

FAST FACT

Martin Luther blazed the trail for the Christological teaching style, which essentially means to highlight Christ—or the promise of Christ—when expositing Old and New Testament Scriptures.



Another well-respected theologian and professor, Dr. Tremper Longman III, says this about the application of the Song:

Throughout the Bible relationship with God is described by the metaphor of marriage. As with any metaphor, the reader must observe a proper reticence in terms of pressing the analogy. Nonetheless, from the Song we learn about the emotional intensity, intimacy, and exclusivity of our relationship with the God of the universe.¹⁰

The exclamation point of these few paragraphs is that this candid love poem isn’t just for

married people! Whether you got roses from a sweetheart this past Valentine's Day, feel called to singleness, have celebrated your fiftieth wedding anniversary, are struggling with divorce or the death of a spouse, or you're connecting with someone via an e-mail romance, the Song of Songs is for you!

did you know?

The Song of Songs is part of the third section of the Hebrew Bible called the **Kethubim**, which means "the Writings." The Writings are a pretty diverse collection, including the prophetic book of Daniel; the historical books of Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah; the poetry of Job, Psalms, and Proverbs; and finally a section called the Five Scrolls, which includes Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther, and the Song of Songs.

These five books were very familiar in Hebrew culture because they were read out loud at major Jewish festivals in much the same way we might emphasize the spiritual significance of Easter with a passion play or dramatize the birth of Christ with people in bathrobes pretending to be shepherds. The book of Ruth was read out loud at the Feast of Weeks, celebrating the barley harvest in late May (Ruth 2–3; this was fifty days after Passover; Pentecost happened then, too). Lamentations was read out loud in late July to commemorate—or **lament**—the anniversary of the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 BC (2 Kings 25:1–12). Ecclesiastes was read at the Feast of Tabernacles in late September or early October, when they built and decorated elaborate outdoor shelters—or **tabernacles**—commemorating their forefathers' time in the wilderness (Leviticus 23:33–44). Esther was read at the Feast of Purim in late February, which celebrates the Jews' deliverance from the genocidal intent of Haman—he's the obnoxious guy who was hung on the gallows he had his servants build for Mordecai, Esther's guardian (Esther 9:16–22). And our focus, the Song of Songs, was read at Passover, which is considered the most significant of the Hebrew festivals as it celebrates their deliverance from Egypt (Exodus 12:12–14).¹¹

In light of the “Did You Know?” fact about the place of the Song of Songs in Hebrew culture, why do you think the book was chosen by Jewish religious leaders to be read out loud at Passover?

Dying for a Kiss

Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth!

Song of Solomon 1:2

My first kiss with the last man I dated was sweet. We'd been together for a while and were committed to getting to know each other well before sharing physical affection. So when the moment finally arrived, I was more than ready! We were standing outside on a starry night, after sharing a great meal in a romantic restaurant, and he began to tease me about how long he'd been waiting for this particular peck. His voice was warm, his eyes were twinkling, and he looked oh, so handsome in his suit. So when he leaned toward me, I responded with a grin, closed my eyes, and kissed him back!

Jeanne Guyon was a fiery Frenchwoman who got into a lot of trouble because of one particular kiss recorded in Scripture. She wrote a commentary on the Song of Songs (among various other biblical manuscripts) in the seventeenth century. And she had the courage to write that the lyrics in Solomon's Song could be applied to all believers, not just Solomon and his bride. She was one of the first commentary authors to observe that this ancient poem illustrates the love relationship between God

and us. She wrote that the *kisses of his mouth* referred to a spiritual union: “a real, permanent, and lasting experience of God’s nature. The kiss is the union of God’s spirit to your spirit.”¹² Which makes my parking lot smooch pale by comparison!

As a result of Jeanne Guyon’s Christocentric, yet controversial, interpretation, some of the most influential churchmen in France (including Archbishop Bossuet, a man referred to as “the Catholic Church’s answer to Martin Luther”) gathered to investigate her writings. Historical accounts reveal that these powerful men of the cloth were none too pleased by Madame Guyon’s style.¹³ Of course, most of them had taken the vow of celibacy, so it’s no surprise a book about erotic poetry wasn’t their cup of tea! For Jeanne Guyon to dare imply that we could experience passion in our relationship with God infuriated those religious leaders. So much so that she was eventually sent to prison in the notorious Bastille for her “blasphemy.”

You know, that’s what got Jesus in major trouble, too. For teaching that we could actually experience intimacy with our heavenly Father. That we could have a loving *relationship* with God instead of just mind-numbing religion.



Have you ever felt “kissed” by God? If so, describe the circumstances around His most recent show of affection.



NOTES

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Chapter 3: A Rooftop Romancer

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- 7 Lyrics accessed October 17, 2005, at <http://www.Johnmayer.com>