



## When thou sittest in thine house

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# Marital communication— The sweetest words

Let me hear thy voice; for sweet is thy voice.  
Song of Solomon 2:14

There are many interpretations on the Song of Solomon, yet most would agree it contains lovely communication between a bridegroom and his bride. The two sing one

another's praise. They speak with love and respect. Their speech involves sharing personal thoughts, including inmost longings, in safety. There is mutual trust. This level of communication is a giving of oneself, a way of saying, "I want to know you and I want you to know me." There are no substitutes for heart to heart talks in marriage.

Inspired by the Holy Spirit, the Song of Solomon is a stirring, poetic love song. It is about a man and a woman, a king and a commoner, united in marriage. Further, throughout history many commentators agree that the royal bridegroom, Solomon, is a picture of Christ (Matt. 1:1; 12:42). His country bride, the Shulamite, is a picture of the church. The close communion and love between this husband and his wife is a reflection of the perfect love of Christ for His bride, the church (Eph. 5:32).

This love is powerful. Tried and proven in the most challenging of times, Christian marital love is an enduring gift from God. "Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it: if a man would give all the substance of his house for love, it would utterly be contemned" (Song 8:7). Yet, we are sinful and our love far from perfect. It is good to ask oneself, "Are my words sweet to *my* spouse?" Perhaps some cannot remember the last time sweet words were spoken. Surely, if a spouse does not feel love to the point that it overflows into words, then some serious self-examination is in order. May we strive for better marital communication for the sake of Christ—and for our own marriages, too, that are so under attack.

We leave the Song of Solomon for a moment to look at an important verse.

What the Song of Solomon demonstrates in marital communication, Ephesians 5 explicitly exhorts: Husbands and wives must speak with love and respect.

"Nevertheless let every one of you in particular, so love his wife even as himself; and the wife see that she reverence her husband" (Eph. 5:33).

The husband desires his wife to show love by respecting him. Though he has faults and weaknesses, he wants to know she does not look down upon him. He may endure much criticism at work, but how his *wife* views him is what truly matters. It is outright refreshing in our day when a wife looks up to her husband with exceeding admiration. This is God's perfect design. He created Adam to be the head of Eve.

The wife desires her husband to show selfless, unconditional love. She has faults and weaknesses, but she is comforted by his patience and understanding. Those who cross her path may at times be rude and unkind, but it is her husband's love that she truly cares about. This, too, is God's perfect design. Eve was created to

be under the headship of her husband, to submit to his loving care and direction.

That being said, husbands most certainly desire selfless, unconditional love from their wives and wives surely desire respect from their husbands. Each spouse, by God's grace, should give generous doses of both! A husband who is truly loving his wife will honor her. A wife who is truly reverencing her husband is doing it out of love. Words of love and respect, backed by kind and thoughtful actions, are those sweet words that build up a marriage.

Solomon and his Shulamite demonstrated this. They were overjoyed to get married. For Solomon, it was "the day of the gladness of his heart" (Song 3:11). He did not view marriage as an end to his freedom, like so many do. He did not go out with buddies to indulge his sinful lusts one last mournful time. Solomon truly loved the Shulamite and his friends all knew it. She knew it, too. "He brought me to the banqueting house and his banner over me was love" (Song 2:4). In those days a banner was a large sign attached at the top of a pole and used to distinguish an army or to serve as an emblem. It could be seen from miles away. Solomon's sweet words and kind actions made his love just as obvious. He had no regrets concerning other eligible women. Rather, his heart was glad! She was his exclusive "lily among thorns."

The years pass and the love deepens. "Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness, leaning upon her beloved?" (Song 8:5). All could see that Solomon's unconditional love was such a comfort to his wife. She leaned upon him as they sojourned as one flesh. That is the beauty of married life as we get older, by God's grace. As the Shulamite spoke about her beloved, we should, too: "This is my beloved, and this is my friend" (Song 5:16). Marital friendship seems obvious and basic, but sadly some spouses are not friends. John Calvin said, "There is no poison more effective in alienating the affections than the thought that one is despised." It is never too late, till death do you part, to forgive and reconcile. Statements such as, "I thank God for you. You are such a dear friend" mean so much. Close companionship in marriage is a great blessing.

Friendship also means that a wife or husband does not turn a blind eye to sin. In meekness and humility, we bring the sin to our spouse's attention. After all, friends in Christ *care*. "Two are better than one.... For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow" (Eccl. 4:9, 10). We help one another physically, emotionally, and spiritually. We share everything and communicate with honesty and openly. We learn to lean upon the other through thick and thin.

The Shulamite respected Solomon. “Thy name is as ointment poured forth” (Song 1:3). She magnified his strengths with genuine compliments. She made him to know that he was important and special to her. “As the apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among the sons...” (Song 2:3). We might say things like, “I love being your wife,” “I love how you handled that problem,” “What you said in devotions was so helpful for me.” Words that build up.

A critical spirit, on the other hand, squelches reverence. A woman who criticizes her husband, magnifying flaws, making it her mission to change him does not seem to comprehend his bitterness. The more the wife finds fault, the more the husband withdraws. Sometimes one might wonder if she would be satisfied with a perfect husband, if one existed. Would she respect him? Sadly, probably not, considering she is not respecting the very One who *is* perfect in every single way. Christ is telling her to reverence her husband and she is not listening to His infallible Word. This applies to a husband, too. He must put away bitterness and strife and love God by loving his wife unconditionally.

The Song of Solomon instructs how to deal with disagreements in our marriages, those “little foxes that spoil the vines.” The bridegroom knocks on the Shulamite’s door but she does not want to get up. She calls from her bed with excuses, “I have put off my coat; how shall I put it on? I have washed my feet; how shall I defile them?” (Song 5:2). Like the rest of us sinful creatures, she is taking her spouse for granted. Virtually all couples can attest to this to varying degrees. We need to remember just how precious our spouse is. Certainly, the bridegroom was disappointed, but he does not allow himself to be angry or spew out some snarling syntax. When difficulties arise, two wrongs never make a right. Instead, he leaves her a gift.

Meanwhile, her heart is pricked and she finally rises to the door. As her hands touch the handle, she comes into contact with an abundance of dripping, aromatic myrrh. The lovely, exquisite scent is what she compared him to earlier: “A bundle of myrrh is my well-beloved to me” (Song 1:13). This thoughtful gift expressed, “I love you and am not bitter toward you.” He already forgave her, the first step in reconciliation. How romantic is that? Selfless, unconditional love is *irresistible*. She is compelled to find him.

While seeking him, she finds her friends. Sometimes friends sense a marital disagreement. There may be proper times when a spouse seeks private, godly counsel.

However, it is not honoring if she aims to debase him—even worse, publicly. Besides, her wise friends

are Titus 2 women who teach wives to love their husbands. Their counsel draws out from the Shulamite the positive things about her bridegroom. They ask, “What is thy beloved more than another beloved?” (Song 5:9). She answers, “My beloved is white and ruddy, the chiefest among ten thousand” (Song 5:10). She continues to praise him for several more verses ending with, “he is altogether lovely” (Song 5:16). Instead of going the downward spiral where words are used as weapons, the Shulamite lovingly revered her husband.

By God’s grace, there is a blessed upward cycle. When a husband speaks loving, tender, honoring words, his wife is more inclined to speak sweet, supportive, and respectful words. The more his wife communicates such, the more her husband strives to live up to the honorable man his wife views him to be. The more the husband strives to live as a godly husband, the more his wife strives to be a godly helpmeet. This positive, gracious maturing takes place when the couple gives heed to love and respect one another.

So...are you a romancer or a romance naysayer? Some may think romance is ridiculous, but it exists in the Song of Solomon. When one spouse tenderly expresses a desire to be with the other, making that person feel treasured, how is that not romantic? “My beloved spake, and said unto me, Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away” (Song 2:10). Make known you like being with your spouse. The reminder means a lot. Spend time with one another. Stop looking at your phone and look into each other’s “doves’ eyes.” Keep dating. It does not need to be expensive, a picnic in your yard or a park will do. Count your blessings, enjoy one another, and “come away”!

Although the Song of Solomon is written in poetic style, how you communicate is unique to who you are. A list of required lines does not exist. Speak from your heart, a heart filled with love and respect, and the message will be right. Those who maintain that a husband does not need to express his love for his wife can expect marital trouble. Those who bristle at the calling to reverence, who think it is unrealistic for today, can expect the same. May we pray for much grace remembering what our marriages ought to reflect—the loving communion of Christ with His bride, the church. It is a good witness to our children and all those around us. Good marital communication is for Christ’s sake and important in a godly marriage.