



LOVE LIKE THIS

Ron Pickell

LEADER'S GUIDE

Love Like This—Leader's Guide

Author: Ron Pickell

Cover design and page and cover layout: Claudia C. Pech Moguel

This book was set in Avenir Next 10 point font; titles, subtitles, and headers in DIN 2014.

Available at:

AdventSource

5120 Prescott Ave.

Lincoln, NE 68506

402.486.8800

www.adventsource.org

Copyright © 2026 by the North American Division Corporation of Seventh-day Adventists. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the copyright holder.

Printed in the United States of America | May 2026

ISBN# 978-1-57756-511-6

Journey... Love Like This

Studies in Song of Songs/Hosea

The Bible is a love story told through a collection of what we might consider short stories (books of the Bible). It opens in a garden and ends in a city. God is the passionate lover who refuses to walk away from His unfaithful bride, chasing her to the ends of the earth and sacrificing Himself to save her at all costs. The story is filled with many, many twists and turns. The first half of the story ends with several failed attempts made by the impassioned lover to lure His adulterous wife into a commitment of covenant love and faithfulness (Hosea 2:14, 15).

The second half of the story opens with a shocking new attempt to win His bride through a personal effort of intimate relationship, compassion, personal sacrifice, and undying love—a love the world has never seen or heard of before from the greatest story ever told. A love that most will never understand. Why does He love her so? What makes Him give Himself away to such a faithless partner? It has been said that love makes us do strange things, but this has to be the most surprising of all. Calvin Miller writes about part two of the divine romance in *The Singer*,

*“When he awoke, the song was there. Its melody beckoned and begged him to sing it. It hung upon the wind and settled in the meadows where he walked. He knew its lovely words and could have sung it all, but feared to sing a song whose harmony was far too perfect for human ear to understand. ‘Sing the Song!’ the heavens seemed to cry. We never could have been without the melody that you alone can sing.”—Miller, Calvin. *The Singer: A Classic Retelling of Cosmic Conflict* (Function). Kindle Edition.*

But if the whole Bible is a *Mamma Mia* love story, every romance needs its love song. The Song of Songs, often referred to as Song of Solomon, is the sweetest song of love. Composed by King Solomon (Song of Songs 1:1) for his beloved, it is considered the song of all love songs! Whether written by Solomon or an unnamed author it is believed to have been written by a single source or literary tradition. Closest parallels of the Song may be found in Proverbs 5:15-20; 6:24-29; 7:6-23.

Rather than understanding Song of Songs as an allegory of love between God and Israel or Christ and the church it is probably best understood as a linked chain of lyrics covering the entire gamut of courtship, wedding, marriage, and mature love. It showcases love in all its spontaneity, beauty, power, and exclusiveness—experienced in its varied moments of separation and intimacy, anguish and ecstasy, tension, and contentment.

But what can the Bible teach us about romantic love? It has much to say about divine love, but romance between two human lovers is another story. The Greeks actually had many distinct words to differentiate love’s many expressions:

- **Eros:** Intense, passionate, often sexual love, focused on desire.
- **Philia:** Deep, loyal love between friends, sharing values and experiences.

- **Storge:** Natural, instinctual affection, like that between parents and children or long-term partners.
- **Agape:** Selfless, unconditional love for all humanity, a universal, charitable love.
- **Ludus:** Playful, flirtatious, “game-like” love, common in early stages of romance.
- **Pragma:** Mature, enduring love built on commitment, understanding, and compromise over time.
- **Philautia:** Healthy self-love, self-care, and self-compassion, necessary for loving others.
- **Mania:** Obsessive, possessive love, often arising from imbalance between Eros and Ludus.

The love described in the Song of Songs varies between Eros, Ludus and Philia—a growing passionate love between young lovers meant for a lifetime.

A story of romantic love is not surprising. Hallmark has made a multimillion movie enterprise from story after story. We are just unprepared to find one of the 66 books of the Bible solely dedicated to describing and celebrating it. But why should we be so amazed at this? Love for God is the foundational principle between Himself and the human family (Deuteronomy 6:4, 5). And love for one another is the second great commandment (Leviticus 19:18; Matthew 22:37-40). In fact, Jesus said that “all the law and the prophets hang on these two commandments.” It’s also true that the very first institution introduced after creation is romantic love and marriage in the idyllic garden of Eden (Genesis 2:18-24). In fact, God’s very purpose for managing and populating the earth was dependent on the strength of the first couple’s relationship. With this in mind, should we not be surprised about God’s interest and care for human romance?

But there’s another thing to consider. The passionate love described in Song of Songs is a great illustration of the larger narrative of divine love encompassing all of scripture. The agape love of God is hinted at in Song of Songs, but displayed in greater detail from the prophet Hosea where God reveals His broken heart for Israel His faithless lover. The climax of the story is depicted in a poem of God’s heartbreak: Hosea 11, 14.

Hosea was a prophet to the northern tribes of Israel during their final downfall in the early 7th century. The ten tribes of Israel had split from Judah and Benjamin centuries before following King Solomon. Their spiritual decline can be traced in the books of I and II Kings with many parallels in I and II Chronicles.

Hosea illustrates the nation’s moral and spiritual degradation by their own infidelity depicted through Hosea’s faithless marriage to his wife Gomer—a temple prostitute. Like Gomer, Israel betrayed her marriage vows and sold herself to other gods. The drama is laid out in the first four chapters. But the heartbreak of God as the wounded lover is captured in the poems of Hosea 11 and 14. Here we relive the anguish of God for His beloved Israel and trace His efforts to win her back regardless of the cost.

The two books Song of Songs and Hosea provide a profound lesson about love from a divine perspective. Of course, the real lesson of God’s love is demonstrated at the cross in the act of God’s own great sacrifice by laying down His life for His adulterous lover. These two books help illustrate the divine crucible.

The apostle Paul completes his epitome on love in I Corinthians 13 with the words, “*And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.*” Why is love the greatest of these? This is our invitation to learn the answer to this question from the greatest love song ever written and the divine poems of the prophet Hosea!

Titles and
Topics
Covered in
*Love Like
This*

1. Budding Romance	1
2. Blossoming Courtship.....	3
3. Wedding Song	5
4. Enchanted Evening.....	7
5. Lovers Quarrel.....	9
6. Love Renewed	11
7. Love For a Lifetime.....	13
8. Infidelity.....	15
9. Love For Keeps.....	17
10. Cry of a Broken Heart	19
11. Agape Love.....	21
12. The Greatest of These	23

Breaking
Down *Journey*



1. *Journey* was created for larger weekly on or off campus meetings in a teaching format and small group discussion. The beginning story or illustration introduces the topic of study.
- **Journey Together** helps ease participants into the topic through ice-breaker related questions.



- **Road Map** is the main passage for discussion followed by questions that help draw out the topic. If you are leading *Journey*, feel free to depart from these as needed and come up with your own questions, while staying on track with the main direction of the study laid out in the leader's guide.



- **My Story** has been prepared as a continuation of the larger group meetings for smaller groups that meet during the week to check in with one another and reflect on how God is using *Journey* in their daily life. We recommend these groups be flexible in terms of location and meeting time. Also, the number of questions is limited in the *My Story* section, allowing for more personal interactions and life application.



- **Back Story** is a helpful guide for those leading out in the *Journey* series and is only included in the leader's book.

Getting the
most out of
Journey

Here's what you're going to need for *Love Like This*:

- Good soil—an open and receptive heart
- Working the soil—Determination and diligence
- Hunger and thirst—Desire to follow God as He leads

- We also strongly advise reading the entire books of Song of Songs and Hosea. Use this study guide for your group reading/discussion. The important thing is to really lean into what these books are telling us about love's priority and what they can teach us about how to love well. In fact, set it aside if it's getting in the way of hearing the Bible's message. God is love and He alone can teach us how to love Him and one another.

Best Practices: The five S's of hearing and discerning God's voice

- **Seek:** Pray for God to open up the passage for you. Is there a promise for you to claim, a sin to confess, a word for you to follow, an insight to share?
- **Soak:** Read the passage each day and write down any observations, thoughts, questions, connections, or anything God speaks to you about the passage.
- **Seal:** Seal God's word to you deep within your heart by taking some time to meditate on the most important truth to you this week. Ask God to open the deeper recesses of your heart to teach you what you need most for your life this week.
- **Script:** Journal or write if even a few lines, noting the ways that God spoke to you from the passage, your meditation, or our group time together. This will help you keep better track of God's voice and the way He is speaking through scripture.
- **Share:** Share with someone what you are learning from your time with God in *Journey*. As you share what you are learning, it will help drive God's word home to you even more and you will notice how God will use what He has revealed to you to bless others.

Journey Covenant

I want to follow Jesus in the noble purpose He has for me. I want to participate in *Journey* to enhance my own relationship with God this year. I will commit to doing the weekly assignments and small group meetings.

Signature _____

My best times of availability are

Morning: _____

Evening: _____

Email address _____

Cell Phone _____

Budding Romance

I was standing in the college cafeteria breakfast line and noticed a girl I had never seen before—or had I? She looked so familiar. I couldn't decide why I felt like I knew her. The cafeteria was not crowded so a few of us sat together and she joined us along with a couple of other female friends. I couldn't take my eyes off her. She was so attractive and like I said—*familiar*. I realized later that she resembled a girl I had seen in a dream. Big brown eyes, long brown hair, sweet shy smile. It was one of those dreams that you can't easily get out of your head, nor do you want to. Who was this girl of my dreams? I had to find out!



1. Share something about your first crush.
2. What attracts you to another person?



Read Song of Songs 1:1–2:7

1. Song of Songs is the love story between king Solomon (1:1) and Shulamith (6:13), his bride. Why is there a book on human romance in the Bible?
2. What do we learn about the bride's lover from these first few verses?
3. Describe the bride. What does her darkened skin and unveiled face reveal about her?
4. Friends of the bride and groom insert their comments in v. 4b and 8. What do we learn from their input? How important are the opinions of others on a budding romance? How much merit should we give to what friends think about our relationships?
5. How do descriptions of the bride "like a mare of Pharaoh" and of the groom "like an apple tree among the forest" help define the inner qualities of this couple? How would you compare their inner beauty with their outward appearance? Why does it matter?
6. What qualities are you looking for in a mate?
7. What else jumps out at you about this budding romance? How does it compare with some of your dating relationships with the beginning romance?
8. What additional questions do you have? What more would you like to know about this couple and their attraction to each other?

"I have loved you with everlasting love. With unfailing kindness I have drawn you."
(Jeremiah 31:3)



1. How has God been using *Journey* in your life this week on campus?
 2. What are you learning about giving and receiving love on campus?
 3. What do you hope to learn about love in general from this study on romantic love?
-



Back Story

We know quite a bit about Solomon—also called Jedidiah, king of Israel and Judah, according to I Kings 1:38–40. The successor of his father David, he is described as the ruler of all Twelve Tribes of Israel under a united Israel and Judah. His reign lasted from c. 970–931 BCE.

Shulamith (Song of Songs 6:13) is another story. “Solomon is literally pronounced shulomah in the Songs original language. Shulamith sounds like a feminine form of this. Both names likely stem from the same word, but Solomon has a masculine ending, and Shulamith a feminine one. Her name implies that she is Solomon’s feminine counterpart—they complete each other. That completeness is underscored by the word likely at the root of both of their names—shalom, indicating wholeness and fulfillment.” (Dr. Craig Glickman, *Solomon’s Song of Love*, Howard Press, 2004, pp. 115, 116.)

But who is Shulamith? Is she the ideal or unidentified true soulmate of Solomon’s reported 700 political wives and 300 concubines (I Kings 11:1–9)? The Song never explains this. She and Solomon appear to be the lovers of a true romance—the biblical Romeo and Juliet.

It is crucial to remember that this is poetry—a song of love—meaning it is a depiction of idealized romantic love and as with all romances contains both fiction and non-fiction. Once again quoting from Dr. Glickman, “The Song encourages openness to love, freshly expressing a timeless paradox: In giving love, we receive it; but in withholding it, we lose what we are trying to protect” (p. 5). “Love songs describe a heightened awareness of the world around us and feelings of joy and wholeness” (p. 7). For example, consider “Till There Was You,” I didn’t hear the birds in the sky singing or the bells on the hill ringing!

Song of Songs is a biblical example of what romantic human love should look like with all the respect, appreciation, pathos, and sensuality humans were created with. This is how God designed us to love. This is human romance divined by God for God is love! It reminds us to love like this.

Blossoming Courtship

We were walking through a field talking as we walked along. I slipped my arm over her shoulder and she didn't refuse it. But even more, she placed her arm around my waist. That's when I knew that the feelings being nurtured in me for her were not just my own. She was obviously feeling my same attraction.

True romance is never 50/50%. It's 100/100%. Both partners need to be fully engaged. One person can never love enough for both people. A healthy courtship is a mutual affair and nothing can compare to knowing and feeling loved the same as the other. What can we learn from Solomon and Shulamith's courtship about mutual attraction?



1. What is your shortest/longest dating relationship?
2. Have you ever told someone you were romantically involved with that you love them? How did that go?



Read Song of Songs 2:8–3:5

1. The stanzas in the Song go back and forth between the man and the woman. Determine who is speaking to the other. What are they saying to each other and what can we learn about their courtship?
2. What is the difference between dating and courtship?
3. What excites you or scares you about marriage?
4. How is Solomon like a gazelle looking through the window? What does this reveal about his intentions?
5. What is your impression of Solomon's proposal in 2:10–13?
6. What kind of foxes might Solomon have in mind that could ruin Shulamith's vineyards? What is he expecting from her here? What does it reveal about her character?
7. What does this section of the Song reveal about the level of commitment they have for each other?
8. Why does Shulamith warn about arousing or awakening love "until it so desires"?
9. How would you describe their courtship? What additional steps would you suggest to better prepare them for marriage?

"Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love." (1 John 4:7, 8)



1. How has God been using *Journey* in your life this week on campus?
2. What inspires you about Solomon and Shulamith's courtship?
3. What preparations or changes do you need to make in yourself to be ready for marriage?



Back Story

There's a detectable rhythm and progression in the Song of Songs. It moves from attraction, dating, courtship, wedding, wedding night, distance, reunion, and life together—the entire scope of a marriage relationship. Lesson two focuses on dating and courtship. The scene moves from the vineyards that Shulamith is consigned to by her overbearing brothers making her skin dark from the blazing sun and the pastures where Solomon tends his sheep on to the palace where she excels in beauty in comparison with the pampered beauties of Solomon's court.

Solomon is overtaken by her dove-like eyes and refers to her as his "darling companion." Shulamith is more than a romantic thrill. She is his equal and cannot compare to the veiled and pretentious maidens that surround him.

Solomon is equally handsome in her eyes. Compared to others, he is an apple tree among the other trees (men) of the forest. In other references, Solomon is like a gazelle leaping toward her or a young stag—strong and majestic.

Courtship is the time to become better acquainted and learn all a couple can about each other to determine their compatibility and mutuality. In ancient times, engagement was more than a proposal for marriage. Getting out of a formal engagement necessitated a divorce. A good example is Joseph with Mary, the human father and mother of Jesus when Joseph learned that Mary had become pregnant during their engagement period. Matthew writes that Joseph decided to divorce her quietly even though they were not officially married. In fact, according to Luke's gospel they were not married at the time of Jesus' birth and had never been intimate, establishing Jesus' virgin birth (Matthew 1:18-25; Luke 2:1-7).

The back-and-forth interactions between Solomon and Shulamith and their attractions to each other in the fields and the palace along with their social gatherings among family and friends out in the vineyards, pastures, and the palace paint a picture of ever increasing desire and romance that leads to marriage and covenant love. We are left in this week's lesson with the image of divine pleasure and fulfillment from the joining of two lives that complete each other in their intensifying love! Again, scripture seems to be announcing that we are to love like this!

Wedding Song

The first wedding I remember was between my older brother and his fiancée. I was six and a half years younger than him. Still, he asked me to be his best man. I was hardly a man at the young age of 14 and was truly honored to stand up for him. I looked up to my brother. He stood like a royal prince with his beautiful princess. Even though I was so young, the whole event was magical.

The bride's younger sister was the maid of honor and very attractive. She was a few years older and definitely dating material for a person closer to her age. I was so excited to be marching down the aisle with her at my side. It was a wedding I will never forget.

Another memory from their wedding was a song at the reception, "Longer Than," written and sung by Dan Fogelberg. The Song of Songs has now brought us to the wedding in this grand processional of the prince and his princess. I can only imagine the music performed in their honor!



1. Which weddings you have attended stand out most in your memory?
2. What concerns you the most—the wedding or marriage and why?



Read Song of Songs 3:6–11

1. The wedding ceremony/procession is only a few stanzas. What stands out to you from these verses?
2. How important are the making of vows to one another before God and witnesses?
3. Why do you think the main focus of the wedding ceremony is the chariot and procession of Solomon?
4. If you are the bride what impresses you or disagrees with you about Solomon's procession?
5. If you are the groom, what do you like or not like about Solomon's procession?
6. What key elements do you want to include in your wedding ceremony?
7. What excites you or scares you about marriage?
8. What kind of statement should the wedding ceremony make in relation to the marriage?

"I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.'" (Revelation 21:2, 3)



1. How has God been using *Journey* in your life this week on campus?
2. What spiritual lessons have you drawn from Solomon and Shulamith's wedding?
3. What additional details do you wish had been included in their wedding ceremony?



Back Story

Weddings! It's been said that if a couple can get through the wedding the marriage will be a breeze. I don't necessarily agree with that since the wedding is only an event and marriage is a lifetime, but I get the point. Planning the wedding service can be the first big challenge a couple has to navigate together and the more elaborate and complicated it is the more anxiety it can produce for the bride and the groom which says nothing about the cost that weddings can incur. It's no wonder that many opt for a simple affordable service with the justice of the peace.

Here's what I discovered from Google about a typical ancient Middle Eastern wedding:

- "Ancient Middle Eastern weddings were elaborate, multi-day community celebrations focused on contract, union, and fertility. Key traditions included the signing of a marriage contract (Nikah/Katb Al-kitaab), presentation of a dowry (mahr), and the festive "Henna Night," where the bride's hands and feet were decorated with dye.
- **The Marriage Contract:** Weddings were legally binding, with a contract signed by the couple and witnessed by male family members, often conducted by a religious leader.
- **Mahr & Gift Giving:** The groom presented a *mahr* (dowry) to the bride as a mandatory gift, securing her financial security.
- **Henna Night:** A pre-wedding ritual where the bride's hands and feet were adorned with intricate henna designs to symbolize fertility and bring good luck.
- **Procession (Zaffa):** A lively, noisy procession with music, dancing, and drums (Zaffa) that traditionally accompanied the couple.
- **Symbolism & Rituals:** In Persian traditions, a *Sofreh Aghd* (ceremonial table) featured items like a mirror (light), honey (sweetness), and nuts (fertility).
- **Clothing & Jewelry:** Brides often wore elaborate, heavy jewelry, such as the Yemenite *gargush* (a beaded, conical headpiece).
- **Separation of Celebrations:** Men and women often held separate pre-wedding parties, with the groom sometimes undergoing a traditional shaving ceremony."

Also, weddings could last an entire week which is why the wine having given out in the wedding feast at Cana that Jesus' mother hosted had become such an issue (John 2). Solomon and Shulamith's wedding was no less an affair, I am certain, with Solomon as the king. The grand procession of Solomon in his chariot entering to escort his bride to be with 60 horsemen must have been quite a sight.

The wedding service is so important since it is the marriage covenant made before God and the wedding party solidifying the love, faithfulness, and fidelity between the bride and groom. This is the official binding or joining of their lives in holy union. It is where the two lives join to become one new life under the blessing and covenant faithfulness of God.

In Paul's letter to the Ephesian house church he goes into great detail about the solemnity of the marriage union which we will talk about more in a later lesson (Ephesians 5:21-33). In fact, he calls the mutual sacrifice between the groom and the bride symbolic of the mysterious sacrifice Jesus made on behalf of His bride—the church. But for now, it is important to emphasize that the wedding service solemnizes the union of the couple in their submission one to the other for the glory of God! Another example from scripture reminding us to love like this.

Enchanted Evening

The wedding night seldom turns out how Hollywood sensationalizes it. For those that have saved themselves for their one true love it comes with great anticipation. My wife and I were exhausted from the wedding service and a fight just outside our hotel room made for an incredible distraction coupled with having to sit for my Greek final the next morning. All this put a damper on everything except the privilege of finally being alone and legally spending the night in the same bed together. The important thing, along with Solomon, I knew I had married my soulmate and that like Shulamith, she was, "Completely beautiful, my darling companion, with no blemish in her" (SoS 4:7).



1. How did you learn about sex? Who did you have the conversation with?
2. How would you explain the wedding night to a five-year-old?



Read Song of Songs 4:1–5:1

1. How do you define intimacy?
2. What stands out to you about the couple's first night together?
3. Solomon provides seven compliments of his beautiful bride. Why does he consider her a "flawless beauty"?
4. What makes you uncomfortable about the couple's love making?
5. What is the meaning here for those who question the beauty, playfulness, and enjoyment of sex?
6. If this is God's view of sex in marriage then why do so few couples experience nothing like this?
7. The Song reserves "going all the way" for marriage. How does it make waiting till marriage seem attractive?
8. What can we learn from today's passage about reigniting passion in a loveless marriage?

"In that day," declares the Lord, "you will call me 'my husband'; you will no longer call me 'my master.'" (Hosea 2:16)



1. How has God been using *Journey* in your life this week on campus?
2. What is God teaching you about love and intimacy?
3. What questions do you need to ask before giving yourself completely to another person?



Back Story

Charles Wittscheibe wrote a book titled *God Invented Sex* where he discussed the positive and sacred act of human sexuality. The book was published in 1974 during the sexual revolution. Wittscheibe was a Seventh-day Adventist author and the book created quite a stir among prudish conservative Christians. The book's title alone caused some to squirm. However, if Wittscheibe's book was controversial, Song of Songs was definitely way ahead of its time.

Solomon extols his beloved's beautiful eyes, teeth, lips, neck, breasts, love making, and virginity. Some of the more explicit references from their wedding night demand further explanation.

Solomon refers to her as both his sister and his bride. He uses this expression four times throughout the Song. In ancient Hebrew culture sister/bride was apparently an affectionate term for one's wife. The marriage bond created a family relationship as real as brother and sister.

- He mentions how his heart beats faster with the glance of her eyes and a strand of her necklace.
- Her love making is more intoxicating than wine.
- Her locked garden is symbolic of her virginity and he praises her for keeping herself only for him.
- Later she calls to the north wind to blow upon her garden to summon Solomon to partake of her delicious fruits. Solomon responds by entering her garden as a poetic expression of solemnizing their becoming one.

If God is the narrator He is the One blessing their wedding night: *"Eat, O darling companions. Drink and be drunk, O beloved ones"* (SoS 5:1).

After reading and meditating on the Song of Songs, I can only conclude along with Wittscheibe that God is the inventor or creator of sex. It was meant to be a sacred act of ever deepening passion between two people attracted to each other for their inner and outward beauty climaxing in the potential creation of a new life formed through their mutual love making. There is nothing dirty or tawdry about sexual intimacy when expressed within the bounds of marriage and the blessing of God. He apparently loves to see two people in love with each other and enjoying complete and total spiritual, emotional, and sensual satisfaction in their shared lives together.

My not so uncomplicated definition of marriage is "shared life." The extent of a couple's happiness is dependent on their level of giving themselves to one another. Unhappy marriages are the result of withholding areas of ourselves from each other including who we are, who we want to be, our likes and dislikes, emotions, and even our physical bodies.

Marriage and sexual union between two people in love and committed to each other is the celebration of shared life and the crowning gifts of God to the human family. It is something to give thanks for. Something the Song of Songs celebrates without apology and not ashamed to sing about! Scripture teaches us to love like this.

Lovers Quarrel

It's surprising to see the manipulative games some couples play to feel assured of each other's affections. The wife of one couple I knew was very flirtatious with other men. Her husband was probably a bit too trusting and didn't seem bothered by it. It turned out that she had some unresolved issues with her father and had experienced some sexual abuse at a younger age. It finally reached a boiling point when she had to admit to sharing romantic feelings for someone else. Fortunately, she went for counseling and through therapy was able to drill down on her dysfunction. Her response saved their marriage and they have been happy together for many years.

Pay attention to the heart strain between Solomon and Shulamith. What can we learn from the Song about relationship drama and the cooling off of love?



1. Describe one of your relationship break-ups.
2. What does it feel like to be "love bombed" and then ghosted?



Read Song of Songs 5:2–6:3

1. How would you define "gaslighting"? When have you experienced it?
2. Was Shulamith playing some kind of game with Solomon by not answering the door? Why did Solomon leave so quickly, leading her to run after him? Who was at fault here?
3. Shulamith refers to Solomon as both her lover and friend. Why is it important for our marriage partner to be both? Which is more important?
4. What mistakes does Shulamith/Solomon make?
5. What surprises you about their conflict? How do conflicts that are resolved demonstrate a healthy relationship?
6. What steps have you used to resolve conflict?
7. What surprises you about the city watchmen beating Shulamith?
8. How can you tell that Shulamith's love for Solomon was revived?

"Ever since the time of your ancestors you have turned away from my decrees and have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you," says the Lord Almighty." (Malachi 3:7)



1. How has God been using *Journey* in your life this week?
 2. What can you expect to see from couples that are secure in each other?
 3. What is God teaching you about maintaining healthy relationships?
-



Back Story

What's going on with this couple? Everything has been going so well then all of a sudden they are apart from one another. They are obviously attracted to each other. So far they have experienced the birth of love; time alone in nature (courtship); awakening of sexual desire; patience in waiting; anxiety when apart; wedding day and night. If this was a Hallmark movie the next thing we would expect is a snapshot of their new home and the birth of a child. Instead, we are confronted with Shulamith taking her lover for granted and Solomon running away instead of waiting for her to open the door.

Here's what we know. The wedding night is over. On that night Shulamith couldn't sleep and invited him into her garden. But now she appears tired and anxious, and she is still in her morning robe. He is restless to see her. She is comfortable in bed. Solomon addresses her with more terms of endearment here than in any other part of the Song, yet she gives only a lukewarm response: "I've taken off my cloak; must I put it back on? I had washed my feet; must I get them dirty?"

What a contrast. How can the flame of love die down so quickly? Before she couldn't sleep, but now she considers it an inconvenience to get up and answer the door. Then the night watchmen had helped her find Solomon; now they mistake her for a criminal in the night and beat her.

It has been suggested that the myrrh was from a perfumed love note left by Solomon which helped rekindle her feelings toward him and has her go in search for him.

It's tempting to put it all on her, but the Song reveals that he ran away. Was this his response from his advances being rebuffed? Often that's how it goes. In the end the quarrel has them making up and realizing what she loves about him all the more. She enlists her girl friends to help her search for him. When they ask what she sees in him, she runs through the list of all he means to her. He is radiant in her eyes, black hair, dove-like eyes, spice-like cheeks, lotus flower lips, hands of gold, abdomen of ivory, legs of marble on a pedestal of gold with a mouth of sweetness itself. She ends her dream state with: "Everything about him is desirable to me!" (SoS 5:16).

Is it possible that after so long in the fields and vineyards that life in the palace had distracted her from how much he meant to her?

Her friends ask her where her lover has gone. She knows where he is and she must go to him. But how can she face him after refusing him? The stanza ends with the confidence she has in their love, "I am my lover's and my lover is mine" (SoS 6:3). The strength of their relationship and the bond a couple has with each other is always the tether that keeps them together and the glue that helps them stay connected through any conflict. Loving like this is an example of resolving conflict.

Love Renewed

Resolving conflict even for the greatest of lovers doesn't come easy. Even small rifts in a relationship demand great sensitivity, humility, dedication, commitment, and personal introspection. The opposite of love isn't hate. It's indifference—the very issue that troubled Solomon and Shulamith proved too much for good friends of ours. In their case it was the husband who prioritized himself over his wife too many times until she became used to being without him. Shulamith and Solomon's separation was brief and not so formidable that they were able to find their way back to each other. What can they teach us about rekindling the fire in a smoldering relationship?



1. What keeps you from saying you're sorry?
2. How can you be sure that someone has forgiven you?



Read Song of Songs 6:4–7:9

1. Who seems to be most at fault in their separation? How can you tell?
2. What do Shulamith's friends encourage her to do? Why does she seek Solomon out?
3. It has been said that love is never having to say you're sorry which seems to imply never making a mistake or hurting each other. How does the Song push back against that argument?
4. How does Solomon react to Shulamith's seeking him out? What surprises you about his warm reception?
5. This is where we learn Shulamith's name. As already mentioned, it is probably a feminine form of Solomon's name as in Don and Donna. Why is their reunion the appropriate time to learn her name? How does her name and their relationship renewal symbolize and cement their oneness?
6. What friend do you need to reconcile with? Who needs to take the first step?
7. How can you tell that they have found their way back to one another with their love restored?
8. What do we learn about love from today's lesson?

"I have loved you with an everlasting love therefore with loving kindness I have drawn you, says the Lord!" (Malachi 3:7)



1. How has God been using *Journey* in your life this week?
2. What is God teaching you about reconciliation and resolving conflict?
3. How can God use you to be an instrument of reconciliation?



Back Story

The first verses in chapter six (final verse from last week's lesson) are what form the theme in this stanza of the Song. Shulamith has learned where her lover is and has resolved that she must go to him—*"I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine—he grazes among the lotus flowers"* (SoS 6:2, 3).

He ran away, but she was the one who took him for granted so she took the first step to rekindle their love. Still, this stanza focuses more on Solomon than her. All she has to do is return and like our divine lover he is ready to receive her back and to extoll her beauty. However, unlike the wedding night where Solomon gushes on her sensuous body, here he focuses more on her character than physical appearances.

"Sixty queens there are, and eighty concubines, and maidens without number, but unique is she—my perfect one!" (SoS 6:8, 9).

The previous stanza is the voice of Shulamith remembering how wonderful and amazing her lover is helping rekindle her affections. This stanza is the voice of Solomon welcoming her back from her seeming indifference.

What are the steps back from detachment? These steps are already recorded in *Journey* series #10, but here they are again:

- *Acknowledge*—what we have done wrong
- *Accept*—full responsibility
- *Confess*—how we hurt others and ourselves
- *Repent*—(in this case from neglect)
- *Ask*—for forgiveness
- *Atone*—do our best to make amends
- *Correct*—seek help in changing our behavior

Of course we may be making more of this than is warranted, but as the opening story makes clear, taking the ones we love for granted is worse than hate since hate is expressing some kind of emotion. Neglect is the beginning of the end of a relationship.

It's also quite common since relationships never stay at the same romantic high as the beginning of the romance. Every couple, no matter how deep and committed they are, experience romantic highs and lows. The danger is completely falling out of love and the answer is doing exactly what Shulamith did when it was brought to her attention by remembering how and why she loved Solomon to begin with and rekindling the flame before it dies out completely

Solomon is also a great example in returning her affections. The way back to love and renewal is checking where we have begun to take one another for granted and quickly correcting our course by restoring the love and passion felt in the beginning. The way back to love is the same path that leads us to it—valuing and appreciating each other above all others and letting one another know how much they mean to us! Successful marriages that begin to drift away from each other learn together how to love like this!

Love For a Lifetime

Falling in love is not difficult. It's actually much like any other kind of tumble. Attraction is the first trip into romance. It's not hard to fall in love, but staying in love and keeping love alive is another story.

The Notebook, a romantic love story a bit like Song of Songs, takes us on a journey through all the stages of a couple's romance from attraction to dating, challenge, breakup, recovery, symmetry, and final years together. Spoiler alert if you've never seen it—the wife is plagued with dementia in the end and goes in and out of remembering her lover. The closing scenes are the most touching as the couple fall asleep in each other's arms and breathe their last together. It's a story of lasting love—mature love that survives even the test of senility. How can we love like that? What can the Song teach us about love like a fine wine that deepens and matures through a lifetime?



1. What friends do you still keep in touch with from childhood?
2. What helps you stay connected with others?



Read Song of Songs 7:9–8:14

1. What are the clues that this stanza is about lasting love?
2. How secure are they in their love for each other? How can you tell?
3. She wishes that her lover was more like a brother? What does this have to do with PDA? What effect would it have on their romance?
4. How is Solomon's birth under the apple tree a correlation with the awakening of their love? What does it have to do with awakening love when it pleases? When is the best time for love to awaken?
5. Have you ever experienced a love as strong as death, fervent as the grave, and an unquenchable fire?
6. How was Shulamith like a wall? What was she protecting? What did it matter to her brothers if she was a wall or a door?
7. What vineyard has Shulamith reserved for Solomon?
8. What are they calling out to each other in the last verses of the Song? Is this an appropriate ending?

"Truly I am with you always, even to the end of the age!" (Matthew 28:20)



1. How has God been using *Journey* in your life this week on campus?
2. What is God teaching you about love for a lifetime?
3. What scares you about making a vow to love the same person for the rest of your life?



Back Story

We've reached the final verse of this song of all love songs. Throughout the poem we have traversed the highs and lows of their relationship arriving here at a picnic together in the woods—a brief snapshot of the continuation of love over a lifetime. The Song ends with them calling out to one another, first Solomon to his beloved, "let me hear your voice," then Shulamith in the refrain, "Hurry, my beloved, be like a gazelle or a young stag on the mountain of spices."

Does the Song follow a pattern of love over a lifetime? Is it really a song composed by Solomon about his soul mate? Or, is it just a collection of love poems brought together by an unknown author and ascribed to the wisdom tradition of which Solomon is named? Probably the latter, but reading it as a romantic tale stretching over a couple's life paints a picture of love as God intended.

It has been mentioned that the consistent garden scenes in the Song are reminiscent of the first romance in the Bible where the couple are presented in their naked innocence and complete oneness. In the beginning both stories are portraits of human relationships untainted by selfishness and sin. Human love is meant to reflect divine love offering hope for all human relationships.

I had the wonderful privilege of officiating a wedding in the midst of writing this very study. Being deep in the weeds with this lesson provided a whole new perspective on the wedding service and marriage in general. As the bride was walking down the aisle with her eyes fixed on her husband-to-be and the groom transfixed on his beloved I was suddenly overcome by the greater picture. It was as if God was speaking to me about His grand intentions for love, romance, marriage, and happiness for the human family in the eyes of these two lovers.

It was all there—everything that the Song of Songs unabashedly proclaims. God was saying, "Love like this! This is what marriage is about with all its passion and pleasure. This is and always has been My heart's desire—that humans would know the joy of loving and being loved by the person who knows them as a friend, a lover, sister/brother and lifelong soul mate."

"My beloved is mine and I am his" sings the Song. It's the reason why even in the beginning it wasn't good for Adam to be alone. It's why God delicately fashioned Eve from just over his heart that they would beat as one. This was God's desire! This is what He intended! Yes, yes, my beloved, love like this!

Infidelity

Hosea 1–2:13

Fortunately, I have never experienced the trauma and disappointment of adultery. But I do know the heartbreak of being dumped by someone I cared about deeply. The relationship was going so well and I had been attracted to this person for some time when out of the blue she hit me with the message that she wasn't feeling it. I was all set to take things to the next level and she had me in her rearview mirror. As the song goes, "she was a hard habit to break."

The real heartache came when I saw her flirting with someone else which in the end proved to be a good thing as the bubble began to burst and I realized I had been in love with a phantom. She really wasn't the person I had imagined or made her out to be. This made letting go much easier!

Healing a broken heart is a kind of emotional open-heart surgery. What can the book of Hosea teach us about divine heartache and faithful love?



1. How did your parents decide on your name? What is the meaning behind it?
2. Who is your closest friend? How have they proved they are dependable?



Read Hosea 1–2:13

1. What is important to know about the period in which these kings reigned (2 Kings 14:23–29)?
2. Why does God have Hosea marry an adulterous woman?
3. What would you do if you had a wife like Gomer?
4. What do the names of their children represent?
5. How is Hosea's marriage to Gomer symbolic of God's covenant with Israel? How is a covenant similar to a marriage?
6. What message of hope do you find in these verses? What does God promise to do on behalf of His faithless lover?
7. What is God like according to these verses?

"If we are faithless, he remains faithful, for he cannot disown himself." (2 Timothy 2:13)



1. How has God been using *Journey* in your life this week on campus?
2. How have you experienced God's unconditional love?
3. What do you need to be able to love God and others like this?



Back Story

Hosea means “salvation” and is related to the root word for Joshua. He was a prophet from the eighth century in the Northern Kingdom of Israel during the reign of King Jeroboam II. His ministry overlapped the prophets Amos, Isaiah, and Micah in a time of great spiritual apostasy. Israel was courting the favor of the more powerful nations of Egypt and Assyria by worshiping Baal instead of Yahweh. They kept God’s name, but worshipped other deities.

By transitioning from Song of Songs now to the prophet Hosea we are able to compare an ideal love affair where both parties share a mutual affection to a dysfunctional marriage between God and His people mirrored by Hosea and Gomer. Hosea writes out of acute agony of personal grief having been instructed to marry a harlot.

Gomer is most likely a temple prostitute—something God never allowed. Pagan worship believed that “the gods” controlled the weather and were subject to human sensuality thereby stimulating them to bless their crop yield. The more sensual their worship, the more abundant their crops. Hosea uses his own personal tragedy to illustrate the sick relationship that had developed between Israel and God by turning their affections away from Him to false gods.

Gomer’s three children are given symbolic names that proclaim Israel’s unfaithfulness. Jezreel, her first child, signifies avenging the blood of Jezreel on the gruesome dynasty of Jehu (2 Kings 9, 10). Lo-ruhamah (No More Mercy) signifies the end of God’s mercy to the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Lo-ammi (Not My People) was symbolic of God’s rejection of them.

The judgments referenced here as a result of Israel’s apostasy are a direct fulfillment of warnings issued by God to His people during their desert wanderings (Deuteronomy 27-29). The year Israel spent before God at Mt. Sinai was the year of their marriage to God as His permanent possession. He would be to them a husband and they His faithful wife. Forty years later the covenant was rehearsed and reiterated to the next generation before crossing into the land God was preparing for them. They were given explicit instruction on how to keep the covenant and were even warned how they would eventually break it. Hosea’s adulterous marriage is a public announcement that the covenant was officially broken and the time of their fornication with other gods had come!

God hated their infidelity for many reasons as it led them away from Him the source of truth and life and apart from one another. It led them into detestable acts like child sacrifice in hopes of appeasing the pagan deities with their ultimate devotion.

God’s complete faithfulness is the only silver lining in Hosea’s message. Most marriages that experience infidelity don’t survive. The betrayed partner is often unable to muster the ability to forgive and trust again. But the good news in this passage is that God never gives up! His love is not conditioned on our response. God remains who is no matter how untrustworthy we are.

In Song of Songs we learn what faithful, passionate human love is supposed to look like. In Hosea we learn the beauty and faithfulness of our forever Lover. The message of Hosea is *love like this!*

Love For Keeps

Hosea 2:14–3

How do you forgive and reconcile with someone who keeps on repeating the same destructive and hurtful patterns with little or no remorse? That's the question that God has to deal with in today's lesson. Friends of mine were stuck in a similar destructive pattern where one partner kept forgiving and taking her abusive husband back and he kept continuing the same dysfunctional cycle until she could take it no longer. She finally left and stayed out of touch for some time for her own protection.

The marriage finally ended in divorce.

In chapter 2 and 3 of Hosea we learn about a similar pattern with different results. What can these chapters teach us about a love we have never seen before—one that *never ever* gives up?



1. Have you ever had to cut someone loose that you truly loved for your own well-being?
2. What's the best forgiveness story you have ever experienced?



Read Hosea 2:14–3

1. Gomer's harlotry enslaved her and Hosea was instructed to redeem her. What was the lesson here for Israel?
2. How would you describe God's plan for winning His people back?
3. The term "master" in v. 16 might better be translated *Baal*. Apparently the Israelites were referring to Yahweh as Baal—a pagan deity. What desert is He planning to allure His people to and how will it make a difference?
4. How does God describe the new covenant He is planning for His people? What are the promised blessings of this covenant?
5. God's new covenant is clearly a marriage covenant. What are the terms of this covenant? How can God make such unconditional promises to faithless people?
6. What is the meaning of Hosea buying his wife back to live with him no longer as a prostitute? How does this explain God's plan for Israel?
7. God's determined effort to stay with His prostitute wife (Israel) would normally be considered insanity or at best dysfunctional. How is God's unconditional commitment different?

"I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 8:38, 39)



1. How has God been using *Journey* in your life this week on campus?
 2. What are you learning about the new covenant?
 3. How have you experienced God's unconditional love?
-



Back Story

The Northern tribes of Israel during the reign of Jeroboam II had drifted far from Yahweh and were living according to the customs and practices of the nations they were sent to replace. They were given clear instructions not to intermingle with them or adopt their ways.

However, during the reign of Jeroboam II, worship centers were held at Dan and Beth-el and at other old Israelite shrines, in the form of a golden calf like the one the Israelites fashioned at Mt. Sinai. The services held at Dan, Beth-el, at Gilgal, and Beer-sheba, were numerous and degrading. It isn't hard to imagine Gomer serving at one of these shrines as a temple prostitute.

Hosea was instructed to marry Gomer, illustrating God's adulterous marriage with the people of Israel. The story of Hosea and Gomer is surprising enough, but the real message is even more shocking. Like Hosea, God knew that Israel would prove to be a harlot and go after other lovers (Deuteronomy 31:24-29), yet as illustrated by Hosea's marriage, God entered into a marriage covenant with the family of Abraham anyway. Hosea chapter one and the first half of chapter two condemn Israel's adultery and breaking of their marriage vows, but as this lesson affirms, God does not utterly divorce them. Hosea's name, "God is salvation," affirms God's steadfast love even while Gomer's children illustrate Israel's infidelity.

Jezeel, Gomer's first-born son, was associated with king Jehu's slaughter of the remaining family of Ahab (2 Kings 10) in the valley of Jezreel. Jehu enacted a massacre of Ahab's family in obedience as God's divine judgement. As the battle of Jezreel marked the end of the family of Ahab, Jezreel was to mark the end of the northern tribes of Israel at the hand of Assyria.

Gomer's second child was a daughter named Lo-Ruhamah, "Not Pitied." God's patience with the Northern Tribes was over.

Their third child, Lo-Ammi, was another son whose name meant "Not My People." Because of their infidelity, the Northern tribes had become just like the nations around them and no longer resembled the people God had called them to be.

Hosea and Gomer's relationship and adulterous children confirmed God's judgement on the Northern tribes of Israel. But the surprising thing is the turnaround in the story with God's faithful love. Israel is unfaithful as a harlot, but like Hosea, the faithful husband, God, remains devoted. Like the Exodus story, His plan was to allure His people into the desert away from the gods they were now serving and marry her again.

Initially they would be scattered and displaced by the Assyrians. This would be the end of Northern Israel, the end of God's pity and a seeming end of them as his people. But not the end of His covenant or His love for them. God would one day establish a new covenant with His people not based on their fidelity, but on God's fidelity to Himself. God would fulfill His own promise to love the human family unconditionally. This covenant was to be made between God and His Messiah with us as the benefactors. It is unconditional since it cannot be broken. This is how God loves!

"God demonstrated His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." Romans 5:8

Cry of a Broken Heart

Hosea 11

Mildred Pierce is a 1945 black and white melodrama classic starring Joan Crawford as Mildred and Ann Blyth as Veda, her narcissistic daughter who Mildred can never make happy. Many would describe Veda as a spoiled brat. She was ungrateful, disrespectful, and even beguiled her mother's second husband to leave her mother and hook up with her for her money. She seemed bent on disappointing and hurting her mother in every way possible.

Mildred grieves the daughter that Veda has become as God mourns Israel's betrayal. What can we learn from Hosea 11 about love and God as a wounded lover?



1. Would your parents describe you as more strong-willed or compliant as a child?
2. What have you grown to appreciate most about your parents?



Read Hosea 11

1. What images in vv. 1-4 describe God's relationship to Israel?
2. What surprises you about God's vulnerability in these verses?
3. What impact did God's parental love have on Israel described in vv. 2-7?
4. What do vv. 8-10 reveal about God's character? How consistent is this with God's seeming change of heart according to Deuteronomy 4:27-31?
5. We might describe God's judgement of Israel in Hosea as a severe mercy. How would you describe God's mercy here?
6. In what way does Hosea 11 resemble the Prodigal Son story of Luke 15?
7. How have you experienced God's severe mercy?
8. What comfort do you take in God's enduring love?
9. How can this group pray for you?

"Then the Lord came down in the cloud and stood there with him and proclaimed his name, the Lord. And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, 'The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation.'" (Exodus 34:5-7)



1. How has God been using *Journey* in your life this week on campus?
 2. What are you learning about God's mercy?
 3. How are you sharing God's forgiving love on campus?
-



Back Story

In Hosea 11 we see the comparison between Gomer's children of adultery and adulterous Israel. God relates to them as a loving parent wounded by a son who left His side and betrayed Him. God is in mourning as any parent who suffers the loss of a wayward child. Unlike the angry and condemning picture we are often reminded of from the God of the Old Testament in response to human sin, chapter 11 provides another side of God as sad, hurt and broken-hearted. God is presented as One who can't bear to let His people go. He is a God of compassion and, like a faithful Father, searches for a way to save His recalcitrant son. Admah and Zeboiim are neighboring cities surrounding Sodom and Gomorrah that were also destroyed along with them for sins similar to that of the Northern Tribes, but unlike those cities God cannot bear to see Ephraim destroyed (Deuteronomy 29:23).

Again, like a loving father, God remembers His infant child and how He taught him to walk and delivered him from his Egyptian enemy. I can't help but wonder if Jesus had Hosea 11 in mind when He told the story of the prodigal son in Luke 15. It's a very similar story of a Father longing for a lost boy waiting and anxious for his return.

Still, judgement cannot be aborted if Israel is going to find their way home. Judgement is God's severe mercy to punish Israel and help them change course. But their intended end is averted. Fortunately, God is not like us as mentioned in v. 9. God will roar like a lion and His people will come back to Him. V. 11 is a message of hope concerning Israel's return following the judgements of Egypt and Assyria:

*"When he roars,
his children will come trembling from the west. They will come from Egypt,
trembling like sparrows,
from Assyria, fluttering like doves.
I will settle them in their homes,"
declares the Lord."*

Hosea 11:10b, 11

Safe and settled at home. This is the picture we are left with concerning God and His wayward people. These are the children first referred to as Jezreel (judgement), Not Pitied, and Not My People. Now because of the God of great compassion and everlasting love annihilation, no mercy and eternal separation has been ruled out. God devised a plan to gather the remnant of His people home. This is love. This is what a loving father would do. God's forgiveness trumps eternal judgement. Instead, God roars for us to return and find our home in Him! If you're wondering what love is, God is our example to love like this!

Agape Love

Hosea 14

I once read a surprising story illustrating unconditional love. A man and woman were seemingly happily married, but traveling abroad on a business trip the husband was unfaithful and fathered a child with another woman. He wrote his former wife a letter that he was divorcing her. She was of course heartbroken to learn of his affair and of his decision to end their marriage. Not long after, the husband died suddenly, leaving his new wife alone with a child to care for. She was completely bereft. The shocking story is that the first wife began to write to the new one. Over the course of their letters the first wife could see how desperate the other woman was on her own and caring for a child. In spite of her husband's indiscretion she still cared for him and felt drawn to the plight of the young mother and child. She made the incredulous decision to have her relocate and live with her and help her raise the love child.

Honestly, it's got to be the most surprising story I have ever heard outside of what God did for Israel. Let's see what Hosea 14 can tell us about unconditional agape love!



1. Describe a time you confessed to making a mistake or doing something wrong.
2. What do you like most about trees?



Read Hosea 14

1. How significant is it that God takes the first step in Israel's return?
2. What words does God suggest Israel use as they approach Him?
3. What does God promise to do if they heed His call?
4. What is God's vision for Israel's future?
5. Where does God say Israel's/Ephraim's fruitfulness comes from?
6. How would you compare Hosea 14 with Psalm 1? What role does wisdom play in both references?
7. How have you experienced God's unconditional love?
8. What has the book of Hosea taught you about God's love?
9. How can this group pray for you?

"As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him; for he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust."
(Psalm 103:13, 14)



1. How has God been using *Journey* in your life this week on campus?
 2. What are you learning about God's unconditional love?
 3. How is God helping you to become a fruitful tree on campus?
-



Back Story

God's promise in Hosea 14 is a story of covenant renewal. It marks an about face from the earlier warnings of being done with Israel. We could say that the entire message of Hosea is a renewal of covenant faithfulness in spite of the nation's clear betrayal. Even the surprising command to marry a prostitute and father children of adultery is a radical example of just how far God was willing to go to awaken His people to their sin and call them back.

This is an expression of the Hebrew word, *Chesed*, God's steadfast love—a word repeated over and over again in the Old Testament to signify God's constant loving faithfulness as in,

"The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. 'The Lord is my portion,' says my soul, 'therefore I will hope in him.'" Lamentations 3:22-24 (ESV)

The chapter begins with God's *Chesed* love through a call to return to Him and goes on to instruct those who come back with what they are to say in their words of repentance. God continues with the steps He will take to right their wrongs including an inward change by healing their waywardness. Israel will not return to their idols. God will help them flourish like a strong fruitful tree. The chapter ends with a proverb about the ways of God as the path of true wisdom.

Hosea tells the story of the depth of human sin in contrast to the height of God's overwhelming compassion. We aren't told how God will accomplish Israel's turnaround. Chapter three where Hosea is instructed to buy Gomer back from the slave market is a clue, but the final answer concerning their recovery will not come until the New Testament where we learn of the great plan of salvation—God in human flesh shepherding His people home. Still, Hosea initiates a glorious return. Hosea is filled with promise in spite of lacking the details on how it will be accomplished. Here's where the God of the Old Testament and the God of the New Testament are the same. This is what love will do. God invites us to learn the true meaning of love by His own example. The apostle John clarifies it for us:

"Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us." I John 4:7-10

In other words—love like this!

The Greatest of These

I Corinthians 13

Love Potion No. 9 is a 1992 American romantic comedy starring Tate Donovan and Sandra Bullock. The film takes its name from the 1959 hit song with the same title. The story is about a love potion that enables a person to make members of the opposite sex become completely infatuated with them by simply talking.

If falling in love were really that simple a small bottle would be more precious than gold. In fact, I know some couples who fell out of love that would line up for even a sip. As we have seen throughout this *Journey* series, loving and receiving love is the greatest thing in life. As the song lyrics go, "Love is a many-splendored thing"! Let's see what we can learn about loving like this in a final tribute to biblical love.



1. What was your favorite teenage love song?
2. Who has taught you the most about love?



Read I Corinthians 13

1. When in your life have you felt the most loved and by whom?
2. What things are useless in vv. 1-3 without love?
3. What does Paul say love is and is not?
4. How does Paul's definition of love compare with the way it's viewed in contemporary culture?
5. Considering how Paul defines love, where do you excel or fall short?
6. How do you feel about being fully known by God? Does that make you nervous or relieved?
7. Why does Paul say that love is the most excellent way and greater than even faith and hope?
8. What have you learned about romantic love, divine love, and loving others from this series?
9. How can this group pray for you?

"This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us." (1 John 4:10-12)



1. How has God been using *Journey* in your life this week?
 2. What is God teaching you about loving and being loved?
 3. What is the best way to teach others to love as God loves us?
-



Back Story

“What’s love got to do with it?” sang Tina Turner. I heard my friend hang up the phone with “Love ya” and faintly heard from the other end, “Love you too.” It wasn’t the first time I had heard them end a conversation this way. Was it just a habit or did it mean something more? I knew this couple and can testify that their love is real, still the words came so casually if I did not know them I might have wondered.

Love is a word we use for so many things. We love sunsets, chocolate, new shoes, and oh how we love getting attention. How can you tell if the guy really means it when he says, “I love you”? Maybe this is why the Greeks had so many words for love in order to differentiate between love’s meaning and application.

In I Corinthians 13 Paul provides a brief definition of what love is and is not. He begins with explaining the priority of love. Without love as he describes it, even the words of heaven are mere ambient noise. Enlightened knowledge from prophetic utterances to divine insight are just more information if not discerned in love. Faith, the very basis of our relationship with God, is without purpose if it doesn’t lead those who believe to love God and others. Even our best acts of compassion like caring for the poor is empty if it doesn’t begin and end in love.

We’ve learned much about love and its priority in the biblical story. To come full circle, the Bible is a love story and makes no apology for highlighting romantic love between those who are truly committed (Song of Solomon). But there can be no doubt that the true biblical romantic is God as we have seen from the book of Hosea.

But the one thing we have only touched on is loving God back. I Corinthians 13 is perhaps the best effort to put love into words. Love as Paul describes it here is the foundation for the prayer that Israelites have prayed for millenia called the Shema: “*Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.*” (Deuteronomy 6:4, 5)

This is what God desires. It’s what He is looking for from those who claim to belong to Him. Loving God is what He expects since love is what God has shown us. God’s love for us and our love for Him is also the foundation for our relationships with one another. Perhaps the key word in this covenantal prayer is the last one—*strength*. The Hebrew word here is Mo’ed (pronounced mu’ad). To love God with all our Mo’ed is really less about strength than loving to the full extent of our being. Me’od is really more of an adverb, as in “very.” In fact, the Bible Project authors suggest that it means to love God with all our muchness—our whole being.

God wants us to experience love that springs from our heart reverberates up through our soul and out from our whole being. He wants us to love Him and to love others like this. That’s why the second greatest commandment is an extension of the first. We are to love others as God is helping us to learn to love ourselves (Leviticus 19:18; Matthew 22:39). God desires that we not only experience love, but that we become the truly transformed beings He created us to be.

But how? What is the source of such love? As the apostle John admits and our journey through Song of Songs, Hosea and I Corinthians 13 agrees—GOD IS LOVE! Only God can help us to love like this and is the reason that the greatest of these is LOVE!

What can the Bible teach us about love?

The books Song of Songs and Hosea provide a profound lesson about love from a divine perspective. Of course, the real lesson of God's love is demonstrated at the cross in the act of God's own great sacrifice by laying down His life for His adulterous lover. These two books help illustrate the divine crucible.

The apostle Paul completes his epitome on love in I Corinthians 13 with the words, *"And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love."* Why is love the greatest of these? This is our invitation to learn the answer to this question from the greatest love song ever written and the divine poems of the prophet Hosea!



Love Like This
Participant's Guide
available at
AdventSource.org.

 North American Division
of Seventh-day Adventists

AdventSource

ISBN 978-1-57756-511-6



9 781577 565116