



RELATIONAL INVESTMENT

Just as a couple must invest in their relationship, believers must also invest in their relationship with God.

SONG OF SONGS 5:6-16

When we're young, we tend to invest in diplomas, careers, and cars. If we have enough resources, we might make investments in fitness center memberships or golf clubs. As we get older, we make different kinds of investments. We're inclined to invest in mutual funds or retirement plans. Our needs change across time and so do our perspectives on what matters most. Whether we're young or old, however, we're wise when we see the value of investing in relationships, beginning with our relationship with God.

How might a person's investments reveal their stage in life? What might a person's investments reveal about their priorities?

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

SONG OF SONGS 5:2–8:14

Chapters 5–8 of the Song of Songs bring to mind God’s directive about marriage, in which He declared that the two—husband and wife—would become one (Gen. 2:24). The man and the woman in the poem got married, and now they’re learning how to live as one as they grow in their relationship. Early on in their marriage they demonstrated the value of investing in each other instead of giving up on one another when they faced conflict that resulted from a misunderstanding. They resolved their conflict and affirmed each other. She described him in loving ways that underscored her love for him. He told her that he had never seen anyone more beautiful. Her physical appearance contributed to her beauty but so did her strength of character that made her a virtuous person (Prov. 5:2–6:13).

The man put his wife on his chariot one day and rode through the city with her so everyone could see her beauty. He spoke with her privately about her beauty. He described her physical attributes with word pictures that captured the depth of his love for her and his longing to be intimate with her. In response, she assured him of her absolute confidence in him. Once more, she affirmed that their exclusive marriage bond involved only the two of them. Earlier she expressed her certainty that the two of them belonged to each other (see 2:16). They were completely committed to each other, and their mutual commitment allowed them to give themselves to each other without any reservation at all (6:13–7:10).

Because of her trust in the love they shared, she took the initiative to strengthen their marriage by getting him away from home for a little while. She invited him to leave the city and take a trip with her to a spot far away. There the two of them could enjoy each other’s company with nothing to distract them. With spring in the air, the countryside would be the perfect setting for them to be together. Although she cherished private moments with him, she also longed for the opportunity to allow everyone to see the love that she had in her heart for him. Most of all, she wanted him with her always (7:10–8:4).

Toward the end of the poem, the man and the woman appeared together again on his chariot. She leaned on him as they made their way into the city. She talked with him about her desire for him to



keep her in his heart. Then she described the resilience of their love. Like death, nothing could stop it. Like fire, love consumed everything in its flames. Just as her husband owned vineyards, she owned her body, and she had given it to him (8:5-14).

Some readers of Song of Songs might ask why Solomon was so expressive about God's gift of sexual intimacy. Solomon wanted to reclaim the truth about sex. Sexual expression and intimacy between a husband and wife is a gift from God. Rather than something to be discarded as a creation of a sinful world, Solomon wanted God's people to know that sexual intimacy was God's gift to humanity from the very beginning of time.

God's people also need to know that the ultimate goal of sexual intimacy is not the sexual expression itself. Rather, the ultimate goal is to build a true and lasting relationship that brings glory to God and leads to family and human flourishing. When the gift of sexual intimacy is properly enjoyed and protected, everyone benefits: husbands and wives benefit as their relationship with each other deepens; children benefit as their moms and dads are secure, happy, and fulfilled in their marriage; the church and society benefit from homes that are stable. God desires for us to invest in building strong marriage relationships.

While reading Song of Songs 5:6-16, note the emotions expressed. What do these emotions reveal about how to foster a relationship?

EXPLORE THE TEXT

THE CRY FOR COMPANIONSHIP (SONG OF SG. 5:6-8)

⁶ I opened for my beloved, but my beloved had left; he was gone. My heart sank at his departure. I looked for him but did not find him. I called him but he did not answer. ⁷ The watchmen found me as they made their rounds in the city. They beat me, they bruised me; they took away my cloak, those watchmen of the walls!

⁸ Daughters of Jerusalem, I charge you— if you find my beloved, what will you tell him? Tell him I am faint with love.

VERSE 6

The bride arose to open the door for her husband to enter, only to find he was not there. This tragic scene pictures a bride seeking her husband, and he was nowhere to be found. It describes the longing of a woman for the partnership and companionship of her husband. Solomon used vivid terms to address the hurt and harm this bride experienced by her husband's absence. He had **left; he was gone**. Her **heart sank ... he did not answer**. How tragic it is when a husband neglects the call to meet the needs of his wife. How equally sad is it when a wife fails to meet the needs of her husband.

How might the failure of a spouse to meet the emotional needs of the other lead to greater issues?

VERSE 7

What happened when the new bride could not find her husband? Unmet needs and desires in a marriage can end in tragedy. The bride, seeking her husband, was met with abuse. In fact, Song of Songs 5:7 has been viewed by some as a reference to abuse—maybe even rape—as the city guards **beat** and **bruised** her and took her **cloak** from her. There is never any excuse for any form of physical or sexual abuse, and any form of other kinds of abuse must never be overlooked or ignored.

Having said that, the episode described in these verses could quite possibly reflect a dream. Earlier, the woman talked about a dream in which she searched for the man, the love of her life (3:1-5). Now she recalled another dream in which she looked for her love, who now was her husband. In fact, the description of what happened to the woman in verse 7 strongly gives the impression that she was dreaming. In reality, she married Solomon, the king of Israel. For that reason, she likely would not have been mistreated by the guards. In her dream, however, they wounded her and then disgraced her.



KEY DOCTRINE: *The Christian and Social Order*

In the spirit of Christ, Christians should oppose racism, every form of greed, selfishness, and vice, and all forms of sexual immorality, including adultery, homosexuality, and pornography (1 Cor. 6:18-20).

VERSE 8

So desperate was this young bride for the companionship of her husband that she sent out a “missing person’s report” across the city: ***Daughters of Jerusalem, I charge you—if you find my beloved, what will you tell him? Tell him I am faint with love.***

Six times in this chapter the woman referred to her husband as her *love*. He was the centerpiece of her life, and nothing or nobody could compare to him. She had given herself completely to him, and her deep affection for him would not disintegrate. She was *faint with love*, and she would only be cured by the return of her husband.

Marriages get into trouble when spouses are distant emotionally even though they’re present physically.

The lonely cry of the woman sheds light on the need for married couples to work at their relationship by being present for each other. Marriages get into trouble when spouses are distant emotionally even though they’re present physically. Emotional distance stunts the growth of the marital relationship. However, being intentional about being there for each other makes a marriage stronger. To use a Solomon-like metaphor, the garden of marriage must be tended every day.

How might the spouse’s search for companionship be compared to a person’s search for God and meaning?

THE CALL FOR REMEMBERING (SONG OF SG. 5:9)

⁹ How is your beloved better than others, most beautiful of women? How is your beloved better than others, that you so charge us?

VERSE 9

The young women's response to the bride challenged her to remember why she was attracted to her husband in the first place. Why did she choose her husband over all the other men in town? What made him stand out? What caused her to love him above all others? These kinds of questions led her to charge the women of the city to inform her absentee husband that she was still lovesick over him.

Relational amnesia can impact a marriage. The numerous reasons a wife or a husband had for entering into a marriage covenant can be forgotten over time. People change, our minds develop in different ways, and our bodies age as the years pass. Unless there is a diligence to remember and guard all the reasons that led a person into a marriage in the first place, the possibilities of the demise of that relationship only increase. By choosing to continually retell their story, a husband and wife can continue to build a successful and long-term marriage.

Love must not be assumed but continually developed and expressed. Remembering why you got into a relationship in the first place can actually help keep you in that relationship.

What is the value of retelling stories when it comes to building and maintaining relationships?

THE CRUX FOR CELEBRATING (SONG OF SG. 5:10-16)

¹⁰ My beloved is radiant and ruddy, outstanding among ten thousand. ¹¹ His head is purest gold; his hair is wavy and black as a raven. ¹² His eyes are like doves by the water streams, washed in milk, mounted like jewels. ¹³ His cheeks are like beds of spice yielding perfume. His lips are like lilies dripping with myrrh.



¹⁴ His arms are rods of gold set with topaz. His body is like polished ivory decorated with lapis lazuli. ¹⁵ His legs are pillars of marble set on bases of pure gold. His appearance is like Lebanon, choice as its cedars. ¹⁶ His mouth is sweetness itself; he is altogether lovely. This is my beloved, this is my friend, daughters of Jerusalem.

VERSES 10-16

The bride recounted the admirable characteristics of her husband. In so doing, she is seen as reaffirming her love for him. Love between a husband and wife will take the form of encouragement. Three themes of encouragement emerge in this section of verses.

First, the bride complimented her husband's physical attributes. The compliments of the bride are effusive. She complimented his strength (v. 10), his hair (v. 11), his eyes (v. 12), his face and lips (v. 13), his arms and body (v. 14), his physique and even his physical presence (v. 15), and finally, the sweetness of his kisses (v. 16). Beauty is in the eye of the beholder. What one considers beautiful or handsome another may not. What is important is to reaffirm each other with words.

There will be seasons when the physical dimension of a marriage will be less important than the friendship dimension of marriage.

Second, the bride identified her husband as *my friend* (v. 16). This is remarkable. For as much emphasis as the Song of Songs puts on the importance of sexual intimacy between a husband and wife, it is vital for God's people to understand there is more to a successful marriage than sexual intimacy. Friendship, partnership, and companionship are equally important. In fact, there will be seasons when the physical dimension of a marriage will be less important than the friendship dimension of marriage. Viewing our husbands or wives as our best friends is essential. A wife and a husband may have a variety of friends and acquaintances but, in the end, the friendship between a husband and wife must take priority over all other friendships.

Third, the bride's effusive support of her husband and her desire for a true partnership with him speaks of an emotional and spiritual depth that is crucial in a successful marriage. A successful marriage

encompasses intimacy, fidelity, and emotional connection. The kind of marriage Solomon portrayed in the Song of Songs is a precursor of the kind of marriage described in Ephesians 5:22-33. There, Paul explained that husbands are to love and lead their spouses as Christ loves and leads His church. Wives are to love and follow their husbands in fulfilling the image of what it means to be in Jesus Christ.

Intentionally celebrating each other in marriage is critical to a successful marriage. Neglected marriages are rarely successful marriages.

One-dimensional relationships seldom survive. If a relationship is based on the physical and sexual alone, then the emotional support needed for a marriage may be absent. If a marriage is just about friendship to the neglect of sexual intimacy, a marriage may be passionless. Successful marriages are multi-dimensional: emotional, mental, and physical.

What are some appropriate ways for husbands and wives to express their admiration for each other?

BIBLE SKILL: Use other Scripture to help understand a Bible passage.

Reflect on Genesis 2:24 and God's intention for marriages to be characterized by lasting devotion. Jot down impressions about investment in marriage that come to mind from this verse. Look at occasions when Genesis 2:24 was quoted, including Matthew 19:5 and Ephesians 5:31. Be sure to read the passages around these verses. What insights do you gain about marriage and the purposes of marriage from these passages? How do these verses give you insight into Song of Songs 5?



IN MY CONTEXT

- Godly marriages should be characterized by mutual moral and emotional support.
- Godly marriages are founded on a commitment to remain faithful to each other throughout life.
- Godly marriages include mutual affirmation of one's spouse.

Discuss as a group ways of responding to abuse. How can the group provide support to people experiencing abuse or who have experienced abuse?

List reasons for being involved in a relationship. What role does God play in the reasons you listed? What adjustments do you need to make to this list in light of today's study?

If you are married, determine one action you will take this week to affirm your husband or wife. If you are single, determine one way of affirming others in their marriage relationships.

Prayer Needs
