

LOVE AWAKENED (Sensuality and Longing)

God has hardwired men to be attracted to particular qualities in a woman that awaken his love. We don't get to decide how God has wired our men. In the Song of Solomon what caused love to be awakened in the heart of this man that God has determined should be preserved for us women for all time?

Her Sensuality (this is NOT eroticism but the ability to engage your senses)

Our five senses are an integral part of our sensuality as women. It's not exactly front page news that we use our senses to create memories. Throughout the Song when Shulammitte is separated from her lover we discover that she dwells on the memory of his *touch, smell, sight, sound, and taste* to transport her heart home to the one she loves. Use the sensual world around you to express your femininity and engage your husband in your sensual world. Science proves that your senses are sharper than his (i.e. women see more colors on the spectrum than men, Galvanic skin tests show our skin is more sensitive than a man's, etc.) so there is a real sense in which your husband can not experience the world in the way you do – and that fascinates him! So part of what makes you alluring is when your husband experiences...the *smell* of dinner cooking, the *feel* of your warm hug, the *sight* of your bright smile, the *scent* of your perfume, the *taste* of your lips when you greet him, the *sights and smells* of a clean home, the *sound* of soft music playing in the background...

These are things we “*get to do*” not “*have to do*”. Cooking dinner and keeping your home are expressions of your sensual femininity. Don't let any other mindset rob you and your husband of something that God uses to awaken love. By bringing your husband into your sensual world, you also bring a grace and beauty to his life that he can't experience without you. Enjoy your sensual femininity!

Her Desire for Him – She longs for and anticipates time with her lover

Married women can learn much from the “*exquisite pain*” Shulammitte experiences as she longs for her lover. The contemplation of his kisses, his caresses and the beauty of him as a person sets off an explosion of desperate desire for him. She demonstrates for us that love grows as much in the absence of our husbands as it does in his presence. Every husband has a deep need to be the object of desire and admiration by his wife. Missing his touch when he is absent (even for a few hours) and longing for his kisses can do much to stimulate passion for your husband. We appreciate most what we long for most. And there is nothing more intoxicating for a man than to have a wife who thinks about him during the day and can't wait to be with him. Shulammitte reminds us that it's not your husband's job to prepare your heart to love him.

How She Views Him – It matters how you see your husband

When Michelangelo was asked how he could create such a beautiful sculpture of David from an ugly piece of marble, he said, he simply chips away the parts that aren't David. As wives we are called to focus on “*David*”, not the imperfections that are not what God intended. We know our husbands are not finished packages, but secretly, we hold them to that standard. In our hearts we focus on his imperfections and soon our marriage is flooded with negativity as the negative pushes out the positive. A woman's heart can become bitter and sick towards her husband and intimacy is lost. God commands (not suggests) that we dwell upon particular things for a reason. Paul puts it this way, “*Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.*” (Phil 4:8)

In other words, let your mind and heart dwell on your husband's *best* (not his *worst*), the *attractive* (not the *ugly*), his *strengths* (not his *weaknesses*), things to *praise* (not to *criticize*). The hard work of marriage is often done at the heart level where we must battle for intimacy by not allowing negative thoughts about our husbands' imperfections to overwhelm our hearts and drive out intimacy. This is not about *denying* something that's true about him; it's about *seeing* the masterpiece that God sees... the “*David*” inside clump of marble.

Your Homework: Engage your senses as you linger in your kisses with your husband!

LOVE AWAKENED (Beauty Secrets)

How to find the kind of beauty that unlike physical beauty is timeless and only increases as the years progress is a question at the core of every woman's soul. Though broadcast time allows for only a few "beauty secrets," Shulammitte reveals the kind of true beauty that inspires and awakens love that isn't found in shopping malls or at the makeup counter...

Her Beauty is in how she sees herself

"I am black but lovely, O daughters of Jerusalem, like the tents of Kedar" (1:5). The word "black" in this verse pertains to the condition of sun exposed skin (literally, "swarthy"). In the days of Solomon, the most beautiful women in the land desired fair skin and worked diligently to protect it from the harsh desert sun. Women who lived in the city (like her friends in the Song, the daughters of Jerusalem) had more opportunity to care for themselves unlike this simple country maiden who worked in the vineyards. Although Shulammitte admits that with her unfashionable looks she may not be a "textbook beauty," she declares she is still "lovely". How is she lovely? Like tents?

She is referring to black tents made from valuable black goat hair used by the nomadic people of Kedar. The woven hair creates a unique surface (still used today) that sheds water and absorbs light and heat but does not release it to the interior of the tent, thus providing the perfect insulation for hot days and cold nights. So what is Shulammitte saying? Like the *Tents of Kedar*, she's lovely because she can take the heat! She does not internalize the harshness of the world by allowing it to upset peace and harmony within herself or her home. We can all relate to this bride who finds she is lacking in beauty as she compares herself to the standard of the day. This bride acknowledges her imperfections yet, she still sees herself as "lovely" *in spite* of her imperfections. In other words, physical imperfections do not cancel out true beauty. Most of us think of a narcissist as a person who is self-centered and full of themselves but consider that other side of the same narcissist coin is a woman who loathes herself (never happy, always picking at something about herself that doesn't measure up). In either case, the woman is focused on... "Self". As brides of Christ, we don't get to look at ourselves any way we desire. You were purchased for an inconceivable price (2Cor 6:19-20). In other words, *you* don't own *you* anymore. Your value was decided on the cross! You died to "self" and now Christ lives in you (Gal 2:20). So this means we don't get to...

- just say anything we want to say
- just eat anything we want to eat
- look at anything we want to look at
- listen to anything we want to listen to
- think just any thought we want to think
- allow our bodies to become unfit and loose the energy to care for the ones God has given us
- wear ourselves out during the day and leave no energy for our husbands in the evening
- just let any wayward comment from your husband seep into our heart and turn the attitude of your heart against him
- allow ourselves to dwell on any negative imperfection of our husbands and allow bitterness to set in

Why? Because your eyes, ears, mouth, heart, attitude, tongue, mind, etc. no longer belong to you. You died and now the "real you" is the indwelling place of beauties of God. When a woman begins to receive this truth, she not only becomes truly beautiful but she possesses a "divine beauty" that is designed by God to be winsome and attractive not only to your husband but also as a witness to a watching world.

The Blessings of God follow True Beauty

"I am the rose of Sharon, the lily of the valleys." (2:1). The Hebrew word for "rose" literally means "bulb" so most experts believe the "rose of Sharon" is probably not a rose as we know them in the West but a common crocus flower that appears only in the most fertile parts of the desert including the Plain of Sharon. This word for 'rose' appears only one other time in the Old Testament in Isaiah 35:1 where the prophet Isaiah warned that while the people of Israel would be judged for their disobedience, there would also come a time when the desert made barren by the wars and pestilence of judgment would once again receive God's blessing and be transformed to blossom like a 'rose' when the Messiah comes to reign.

It is also interesting that the Hebrew word used here for 'lily' (probably a lotus flower) is mentioned in Hosea 14:6-8 where the prophet Hosea also describes a transformation of the desert by God's blessings in which he uses this lotus flower as well as the cedars of Lebanon and olive trees as metaphors for fertility of the desert. Therefore, both flowers

have come to symbolize life and the return of paradise.

You may be wondering, “*How does an aquatic flower like the water lily appear in the desert?*” Archeology shows that at the time of the Song, the Sharon Plain was a marshy place where the aquatic lotus flower grew in abundance. Against all odds in the surrounding deathlike desert environment, the lotus flower thrived. It would literally rise up from the murkiness of the marsh, unfold its prized petals of beauty and rest peacefully on the water’s surface. To the people of that day, the lotus flower came to symbolize life-giving qualities. In this metaphor Shulamite is saying that a beautiful woman...

- Can rise up out of even in a death-like environment and bloom where she’s planted
- The blessings of God follow the Bride. She is the evidence of God’s blessings
- She is a life-giving paradise where God’s blessings abound

Your Homework: Beauty means not letting negativity rule in your heart about your husband. Make a list of 50 things you admire about your husband. Dwell on these and let them fill your heart and mind.

SPRINGTIME OF ROMANCE

When love is awakened, it naturally ushers in a “Springtime of Romance” where Solomon comes to her with an invitation to love. We see in the Song that when a man’s love is awakened, he pursues a woman and when he’s coming for her, he’s coming FAST. She must be ready because it’s the condition of your heart that determines whether or not you can accept love’s offer...

*“Listen! My beloved!
Behold, he is coming,
Climbing on the mountains,
Leaping on the hills!”(2:8)*

*“My beloved is like a gazelle or a young stag.
Behold, he is standing behind our wall,
He is looking through the windows,
He is peering through the lattice.” (2:9)*

When “Love” (Solomon) came to Shulammite’s home offering a Springtime of Romance, she had to be ready to move past the windows, walls and lattices which represent obstacles that would keep her from accepting “Love’s” invitation. To truly experience the adventure of love, we must release those things that keep us physically and emotionally shackled to the past. We must have the courage to let go of destructive routines and past hurts. To accept this invitation to a new season of love with your husband, you must take the chance, risk your heart and step out onto the shaky ground of an uncertain future. On this broadcast we discussed that the inability to overcome offenses can rob you of love in your marriage. When you share a bathroom, a kitchen and a bedroom with someone it is easy to be offended constantly if we choose to be so that when the invitation of love comes, our hearts are bitter. This verse has helped me keep my own heart prepared for a Springtime of Romance...

“An offended brother is more unyielding than a fortified city, and disputes are like the barred gates of a citadel” (Prov 18:19)

This passage means that when you offend a “brother” (this word can mean your husband, a relative or friend) in a disagreement, it can be as difficult to restore the relationship as it would be to conquer a heavily fortified city. Yet, when you flip the coin on the passage and put yourself in the offended person’s position, you see that when you’re the one offended, *you* are the fortified city who is hard and unyielding. If you make the decision to be offended then you also can also make the decision to shake it off. It comes down to a choice, a paradox. To continue in the offended position withdrawn from your husband is to ultimately see love wither and die. You can not lavish your love nor can your husband reach you behind the walls and the gates of an offended position. You begin to misinterpret every word, intention or action of his through the offense. Also, difficult issues are not safe to discuss with an easily offended person. If we decide not to mature in this area and to stay distant, mad about every little thing and become unyielding, then love is already defeated. A great love requires unity and fellowship not bars and gates that separate.

Don’t be deceived. The enemy wants you, your husband, your marriage, your children, your home, and all that is precious to you by shackling you in a loveless marriage. Decide instead to overcome (Romans 8:37) those things that keep your heart unprepared to accept the invitation of love.

Your Homework: Check your heart and choose to shake off offenses that are causing separation from your husband.

THE WEDDING AND HONEYMOON

Though it is difficult to understand all that is happening in the Wedding Section of the Song without covering the entire Jewish Wedding Tradition, what we *can* see is a picture of Christ and His bride as the focus for the bride and groom...

- **For the groom** we see a picture of Christ and His ability to provide, protect and tenderly care for his bride. In the Song, Shulammitte describes a picture of her lover in glorious wedding procession surrounded by sixty of the noblest, strongest, and most battle experienced men in the land (v. 3:7-8). Imagine how Shulammitte must have felt with the finest men in the land coming to protect her as she makes her way to her new home. What a contrast by today's standard for weddings where all the emphasis is placed on the beauty of the bride and unfortunately the symbolism of the groom's strength to provide and protect has been all but lost. Though it is God's design, little if any effort and planning is made to help the modern-day groom understand his noble role (the picture of Christ) as provider and protector and one who will tender love his new bride.
- **For the bride** we see a picture of the joy the bride of Christ feels when Christ returns for her. Shulammitte demonstrates a joy so magnificent at the return of the groom that it overflows into the lives of all who witness. In verse 3:11 Shulammitte invites all to see her husband's "*gladness of heart*". This phrase, "*gladness of heart*" is far too weak a translation for the actual Hebrew. To the Hebrew mind the heart is the very center of a person, the "*inner man*." The heart is the seat of all appetites, emotions, passions, courage, and thoughts. Solomon's "*gladness of heart*" means that Shulammitte's love has captured her husband mind, body and soul. The joy Solomon feels as a result of her love possesses him completely and now all his power, strength and glory he gives to her!

(Continued): PARADISE LOST

Conflicts are inevitable in marriage. At times, like Shulammitte you will be the offender in the conflict. Other times, like Solomon, you will be the offended. Both sides of the conflict have important lessons that God uses to mold and shape us into Christ likeness by...

What to do when you are the offender:

- Humbly admit your selfishness and lack of compassion
- Seeking to reconcile by reaching out immediately to make amends
- Bring to your mind the reasons you fell in love with your husband. Every woman has a public face and a private reality. After conflict, we girls can "put on a good face" to the watching world. From the public's perspective all was well and good yet; the intimacy for Shulammitte was not fully restored until she went down into the garden of her love and checked her heart to see that love still bloomed.

What to do when you are the offended:

- Return a blessing for a wrong done and not demand your "rights"
- Forgive with a generosity that far exceeds the wrong done
- Let the offender know that your love has not changed. In fact, it has grown even stronger through reconciliation.

What to do when you are both: In other words you were the offended person but because you lashed out in a sinful response (i.e. returning evil or evil or insult for insult) now you are both the offended and the offender

- You follow both the pattern of the offender AND the pattern for the offended

It is important to understand that as literal brides, we are part of a living witness of the love between Christ and His Church. Therefore, when love is reunited (or not) between husband and wife, the ripple effects go out for many generations beginning with your own children.

Your Homework: Get a new nightie or one you haven't worn in a while and plan a fun honeymoon night.

LASTING LOVE

This final section of the Song portrays the maturing of our lover's marriage. We see that when love is nurtured in the way demonstrated by this couple, it does not fade. It increases in strength and intensity. In the Epilogue of the Song, the nature and power of love is presented in several "vignettes"...

True love merges identities

"Put me like a seal over your heart, like a seal on your arm." (8:6)

In the ancient world seals and signets indicated official ownership and personal identification by impressing in clay or wax. Because seals were of great value to the owner they were usually worn on a cord around the neck, as a ring on the hand. Some were even worn as a band around the arm. They were used like signatures are today to seal promises, covenants or to give authorization. In this verse, Shulammitte is not asking to be stamped on Solomon's heart or arm; she is asking that he make her the seal. In other words, the power of their love has united them so completely as one that she has become part of his very identity both in the inner core of his being (his heart) as well as externally to the watching world (his arm—also translated as "hand or strength").

The Power of True Love

"For love is as strong as death," (8:6)

So what force could be powerful enough to actually merge two identities? Shulammitte instructs us that it is the power of true love which is "*as strong as death*". Death never fails. The death rate for every person on this planet is 100%. There is nothing you can do to stop death. When true love awakens it has the same power as death—an unstoppable, irresistible force in which no mortal can deny, escape or resist its inevitable power. So is love a commitment? If love is an irresistible powerful force like death then it's more than a commitment—you don't *commit* to death! The Song of Solomon class is a verse by verse study where we get to eavesdrop on conversations, thought processes, responses and actions showing you what to say and do. We observe nuances of how love unfolds in the heart of a man and how it is sustained throughout a lifetime of marriage. So love becomes not a question of commitment but a question of whether or not are you going to put your **faith** in God's Word to build your marriage or will you return to the fleshly, cultural standards for loving your husband and take your chances?

God ignites True Love

"Its flashes are flashes of fire, the very flame of the Lord." (8:6)

Shulammitte is saying that the flames (literally lightening bolts, flames, sparks) of love are so intensely hot that they are like the flashes one sees coming from a mighty *fire*. But this is not just any fire; it is *the very flame of the Lord!*

Shulammitte is saying that when love is given and nurtured in the way she has demonstrated, it picks up strength and intensity and begins to burn with a Divine Fuel. This deep and abiding love that Shulammitte ignites in the heart of her husband represents the uncommon love between Christ and His church and God is VERY interested in sustaining such a powerful witness. What God ignites, can't be extinguished...

True Love becomes Inextinguishable

"Many waters cannot quench love, nor will rivers overflow it;" (8:7)

Even mighty flood waters are powerless to quench a love whose ultimate source is God Himself. Difficulties that would normally extinguish the flames of love are no match for the white-hot intensity of the eternal flames of God.

True Love never ends

"Hurry, my beloved, and be like a gazelle or a young stag on the mountains of spices." (8:14)

In the last verse of the Song Shulammitte is calling to her lover to make haste and join her on the mountains of spices. Rather than end the story this verse separates our lovers again and leads us back to those initial feelings of deep yearning and desire that marked the beginning of their love, "*Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth.*" The Song of Solomon has come full circle. With a stroke of artistic brilliance, the writer never closes the Song. Why? Because ending the Song would be the end of love and the end of desire. Rather, the text folds back on itself and we are left with the undeniable message that *true love never ends*.