

# *A Song for Lovers*

*STUDIES FROM THE SONG OF SOLOMON*



*H. M. S. Richards, Jr.*

# **A Song for Lovers**

by

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# Introduction

Have you ever tried to write a love letter? It can be a challenge, can't it? Even the great poets had to work at it. Robert Browning wrote about his struggle to find just "one word more" that would be "fit and fair and simple and sufficient."

One of the greatest love poems ever written is found in the Bible. Written about 3,000 years ago by King Solomon, it's called the Song of Solomon, or the Song of Songs.

John Milton, who wrote *Paradise Lost*, once said that true poetry must be "simple, sensuous, and passionate." If that's true, then the Song of Solomon qualifies as true poetry.

Back in the 12th century, A.D., Bernard of Clairvaux began a series of sermons on this short book of the Bible. The book is only 117 verses long, but Bernard preached 86 sermons on this poem, writing more than 170,000 words. Even at that, Bernard covered only 34 verses of the 117 in the poem. Think of it! Eighty-six sermons on just 34 verses of the Bible. So the Song of Solomon does indeed have a lot to say.

The poem itself praises the love between a king and a poor shepherd girl. Sometimes he talks; sometimes she does.

So the Song of Solomon is filled with thoughts about love. We're going to focus on just five themes in this small book: love is natural; love is romantic; love is redemptive; love is exclusive; and finally, love is strong.

# Love Is Natural

Love is natural. We must be very clear about this. Much of the Song of Songs is about the physical side of love. Not in the clinical sense, but in the poetic, lyrical sense. This poem is about the beauty and sacredness of natural love.

Let me illustrate this with some verses from the seventh chapter of this poem.

*“What a magnificent girl you are! How beautiful are your feet in sandals. The curve of your thighs is like the work of an artist. . . . Your braided hair shines like the finest satin; its beauty could hold a king captive. How pretty you are, how beautiful; how complete the delights of your love”* (Song of Solomon 7:1, 5b, 6, TEV).

Wouldn't you like to get a letter like that from your lover? Other verses in that chapter go on to praise the beauty of the girl's neck and eyes and head and breasts.

These are verses about natural beauty—physical beauty, if you will.

Since this poem is 3,000 years old, its language is sometimes strange to our ears. For example, in chapter 4, Solomon praises the girl's hair in these words:

*“Your hair dances like a flock of goats bounding down the hills of Gilead”* (Verse 1, TEV).

At first glance, that doesn't sound like much of a compliment. How would you like to have someone compare your hair to a flock of goats?

But in those days, it was indeed a compliment. Imagine the scene at the end of a long day. Across the valley, a flock of goats is quietly drifting down the hillside. The entire flock is moving together, flowing like a gentle stream into the valley below. The peacefulness of the scene reminds Solomon of his lover's hair—restful, flowing, soft.

Solomon also describes the mouth and face of the girl.

*"Your teeth are as white as sheep that have just been shorn and washed. Not one of them is missing; they are all perfectly matched. Your lips are like a scarlet ribbon; how lovely they are when you speak. Your cheeks glow behind your veil"* (Song of Solomon 4:2, 3, TEV).

These verses remind me of two lines from Robert Frost, that great American poet of this century:

*"Love at the lips was touch as sweet as I could bear"* (*To Earthward*, in 1923).

In chapter 5, the girl responds to these expressions of love.

*"My lover is handsome and strong; he is one in ten thousand. His face is bronzed and smooth; his hair is wavy, black as a raven. . . . He is majestic, like the Lebanon Mountains, with their towering cedars. His mouth is sweet to kiss; everything about him enchants me"* (Song of Solomon 5:10, 11, 15b, 16a, TEV).

There's a message in these verses, so graphic in their description of physical beauty. Natural love is a *good* thing. The *unnatural* thing is to ignore the beauty of your partner.

Friend, *every* human being has beauty. As that old line goes, "God don't make no junk." There's something worthy of praise in each person God creates. And how appropriate to praise that beauty in a lover.

The poets have known this for centuries. Solomon was neither the first nor the last to write about the beauty of natural love.

Thomas Moore wrote these lines in a poem called, *To Fanny*:

*"Is there on earth a space so dear  
As that within the blessed sphere  
Two loving arms entwine?"*

Few things are as precious as a loving embrace between two people who care about each other. I don't know of anything else that compares to the beauty of that "blessed sphere" surrounded by soft hugs and touches.

And to think that these feelings are given by God! All we can do is thank God for His marvelous gifts.

I wish we could end this chapter right here. But we can't. Because the devil has cheapened this expression of beauty. Especially in our culture it seems.

C. S. Lewis illustrated the problem this way:

*"You can get a large audience together for a strip-tease act, that is, to watch a girl undress on the stage. Now suppose you came to a country where you could fill a theater simply bringing a covered plate onto the stage and then slowly lift-*

*ing the cover so as to let everyone see, just before the lights went out, that it contained a mutton chop or a bit of bacon, would you not think that in that country something had gone wrong with the appetite for food?" (Mere Christianity, Book 3, Chapter 5).*

Natural love and greedy lust are two different things. Two radically different things.

And we find the difference defined in the Bible itself. The Bible isn't silent on the subject of sex. The ugly is included along with the beautiful. Think of the story of David and Bathsheba. David was the king who arranged for the death of Bathsheba's husband so David could marry her.

That's lust—selfish, cruel, and greedy. Any woman satisfies lust; any man will do.

But love is not like that. Love makes a man want a *particular* woman, not just any woman. Love desires the man for *who he is*, not for the pleasure he can offer.

Shakespeare, in his work, *Venus and Adonis*, said it well:

*"Love comforteth like sunshine after rain,  
But lust's effect is tempest after sun;  
Love's gentle spring doth always fresh remain,  
Lust's winter comes ere summer half be done.  
Love is all truth;  
Lust full of forged lies."*

Most people know the difference between love and lust. Love is lofty, mysterious, beautiful. Lust is coarse, crude, and greedy. I agree with Henry David Thoreau's comment, written in his journal back in April of 1852:

*"I lose my respect for the man who can make the mystery of sex the subject of a coarse jest, yet, when you speak earnestly and seriously on the subject, is silent."*

The Song of Solomon is about love, not lust. When two lovers know their love is a gift from God, when they know their relationship is sacred, they can look at each other and say, "your beauty is perfect. I love you just the way you are—just because you're you."

This refrain appears over and over in this wonderful love song. In chapter 4, the king describes his lover's beauty for many verses, beginning with her feet and ending with her hair. Then he concludes:

*"How beautiful you are, my love; how perfect you are!" (Song of Solomon 4:7, TEV).*



## Love Is Romantic

Love is *romantic*. Perhaps that sounds strange to you. Why should we say that love is romantic? Isn't romanticism just a cheap variety of genuine love?

Not necessarily. Now I know that to some people, falling in love is no better than falling into a ditch. But I just don't agree with that. Nor do I agree with Plato, who said that love was "a grave mental disease."

True romantic love isn't a gift from Hollywood; it's a gift from God. Let me be specific. I'm talking about the love between a man and a woman—the sacred love they have from God. Romantic love in this context is a beautiful thing. It takes the physical side of love and consecrates it with mutual respect and devotion.

One reason I appreciate romantic love is found right here in the Song of Solomon. See if you don't agree with me, that these verses have a romantic glow about them. I'm reading from chapter 4:

*"The look in your eyes, my sweetheart and bride, and the necklace you are wearing have stolen my heart. Your love delights me, my sweetheart and bride. Your love is better than wine; your perfume more fragrant than any spice"* (Song of Solomon 4:9, 10, TEV).

If you're a wife, wouldn't you like to hear words like that from your husband now and then?

Here's another verse from the poem. This time the young woman is speaking:

*"Strengthen me with raisins, refresh me with apples, for I am faint with love. His left arm is under my head, and his right arm embraces me"* (Song of Solomon 2:5, 6, NIV).

If you've ever fallen in love, then these words sound familiar. At least, they should sound familiar!

In chapter 6, the king again speaks romantically to his bride:

*"Turn your eyes from me; they overwhelm me. . . . Who is this that appears like the dawn, fair as the moon, bright as the sun, majestic as the stars in procession?"* (Song of Solomon 6:5, 10, NIV).

Isn't this the language of romance?

I want to say three things about this romantic side of love.

First, we can't hide it. When two people fall in love, it's next to impossible to keep secret.

I still smile at the comment by Ring Lardner: *"He gave her a look you could have poured on a waffle."* Romantic love is like that—thick, sweet, and terribly obvious.

Someone else put it this way: *"Two things cannot be hid. One is a cough; the other is love."* That's the nature of love; it just has to be expressed. And that means it gets noticed.

A second thing about romantic love: It's filled with wonder. It wants to be close. The longing gaze, the warm fire, the run through the park, the tender laugh—these are moods of wonder and fascination.

This kind of love “gazes and holds its breath and is silent.” It “rejoices that such a wonder should exist. . . .” (C. S. Lewis, *Four Loves*).

James Thurber described it as a “strange bewilderment” which overwhelms lovers.

How many know the truth of this line from a modern play: “I came here seeking light in darkness, running from the dawn, and stumbled on a morning” (*Winterset*, by Maxwell Anderson).

That’s the nature of romantic love—full of wonder, beauty, even mystery, that such a thing could be happening.

A third thing about romantic love is its intensity. Note this portion of *Romeo and Juliet*, by Shakespeare:

*“My bounty is as boundless as the sea,  
my love as deep.  
The more I give to thee,  
the more I have,  
for both are infinite.”*

Those are intense words, aren’t they? Concentrated and strong. That’s the nature of romantic love. Another example is Thomas Hood’s poem, *I Love Thee*:

*“I love thee—I love thee!  
Tis all that I can say;  
It is my vision in the night,  
My dreaming in the day.”*

These three traits—visibility, wonder, and intensity—define what I mean by romantic love. As long as the relationship is blessed by God, these feelings are perfectly normal.

Of course, there’s more to love than romance. Just as sex is not enough for a relationship, neither is romance. Romantic expressions of love can be exciting and wonderful—but there’s more to love than candlelight and incense.

As C. S. Lewis writes in *Mere Christianity*:

*“Being in love is a good thing, but it is not the best thing. . . . It is a noble feeling, but it is still a feeling. . . . Who could bear to live in that excitement for even five years?”*

The romantic feelings get a relationship started. But a quieter love keeps it going. Sparks are good at getting fires started; but it’s the glowing embers that keep the fire warm.

Even so, the sparks can be beautiful. Can’t you feel the romantic excitement in these two verses from Solomon’s song?

First the king says:

*“How beautiful you are, my love; how your eyes shine with love!*

And the woman answers:

*“How handsome you are, my dearest; how you delight me!”* (Song of Solomon 1:15, 16, TEV).

## Love Is Redemptive

We've already looked at two things this poem says about love. First, love is natural. That is, the love that binds a man and woman together is physical and close. Second, love is romantic. Many verses in the poem recreate that sense of wonder and adoration so common to romantic love.

But there's more to love than sex and romance. While the natural and romantic aspects of love are proper and good—they don't form the complete picture.

Now, I want to add a new word to that picture: redemptive. Love is redemptive. The best way to illustrate redemptive love is to go right to the poem itself. Early in the Song of Solomon, the young girl says she feels unworthy of the king's love. I'm quoting from chapter 1, now, from the *Good News Bible*:

*"Don't look down on me because of my color, because the sun has tanned me. My brothers were angry with me and made me work in the vineyard. I had no time to care for myself"* (Song of Solomon 1:6, TEV).

The young girl feels inadequate. She's had to work out in the vineyards every day, and hasn't been able to take care of herself.

She's also gotten too dark, she feels. In an earlier verse she compares her skin to the tents people pitched in

the desert (Verse 5). Tents in those days were often made of goat's hair. They were drab, dark, rough, and stiff.

So her message to the king is clear. I'm not worthy of your love. I'm not lovable.

But the king pays no attention to these protests. He responds by saying,

*"Your hair is beautiful upon your cheeks and falls along your neck like jewels. . . . How beautiful you are, my love; how your eyes shine with love!"* (Song of Solomon 1:10, 15, TEV).

The girl didn't *feel* beautiful; but to the king, she *was* beautiful.

That's the meaning of redemptive love. It doesn't depend on people feeling worthy of love. No honest man ever believes that he merits the love of a kind woman. The normal reaction is surprise. "You mean you really love me? That much? But I'm not worthy of that much love!"

This redemptive love tends to *lift* the lover. In many little ways, it makes the person a "new" person.

Perhaps you've heard that prayer of a man newly in love: "Give me purity to be worthy of the good in her, and grant her patience to reach the good in me." That's the nature of redemptive love.

And here we must talk about God's love for us. After all, that's the pattern for human love, isn't it?

Can you think of a better example of love than the cross? Look at the cross from God's perspective. He created perfect human beings. But they all sinned, and sin leads to death. So God faced a problem. How could he offer eternal life to sinners who deserved death?

His solution was to offer the death of Jesus as a substitute for the death of every other person who ever lived!

Now that's love! Redemptive love. Love extended to people who feel unworthy.

And do you know what happens when people accept that love? Everything becomes new. Over and over, the New Testament uses the word "new"—a new commandment, a new creature, a new man, a new name, a new song.

People who accept redemptive love become new persons. They have new identities, new outlooks, new hopes. They really do become new creatures.

Even so, people who receive redemptive love never feel worthy. When Mary was told she'd be the mother of Jesus, she "magnified" the Lord by saying,

*"He hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden. . . . He hath . . . exalted them of low degree"* (Luke 1:46-55, KJV).

John the Baptist said he wasn't worthy to stoop down and untie the sandals of Jesus (Mark 1:7). Peter looked at the Lord and said, *"Depart from me. I am a sinful man"* (Luke 5:8, KJV). The centurion who wanted Jesus to come and heal his sick servant said, *"I am not worthy to have you come under my roof"* (Matthew 8:8, RSV).

People who receive God's redemptive love just don't feel worthy of that love. But that same love always lifts them.

And that's just the way it is with human love. When a Christian man and woman fall in love, they often feel unworthy of each other.

"What have I done to deserve your love? I'm not good enough for you." When genuine love happens between two people, that's usually the reaction.

And just like God's love makes *us* new, the love be-

tween lovers makes them new, too. Their love lifts them, gives them new outlooks and dreams.

One man put it this way:

*"I love her not only because she is so wonderful but because of the way I am when I am with her. She's such an encouragement to me to be the right kind of person."*

Love just improves people. That's all there is to it.

Now this doesn't mean the lovers are perfect. Not at all! But it does mean a commitment to overlook minor faults, and to forgive the major ones.

Thomas Campion was an English poet who lived back in the 16th century. He wrote many poems that were set to music. One of his poems was called, *Advice to a Girl*. Here are two lines from the poem:

*"Never love unless you can  
Bear with all the faults of man!"*

That same thought was expressed by Henry Van Dyke, a minister who died in 1933. *"For love is but the heart's immortal thirst to be completely known and all forgiven."*

I agree. Love includes a willingness to overlook mistakes and hurts. That's what makes love redemptive. Many times we really aren't worthy of love. But we're loved anyway. It continues, even when we don't actually deserve it.

If you've made a commitment to love someone until death breaks the bond, stay with it! No matter what happens, try to keep loving. More often than not, that love will be returned to you, many times over.

To start keeping track of the wrongs, to pay more attention to weaknesses than strengths—these are the things that destroy the beauty of redemptive love.

The ideal is found in these lines from *We Have Lived and Loved Together*, by Charles Jeffreys. After many years of living together, two people should be able to say,

*“We have lived and loved together  
Through many changing years;  
We have shared each other’s gladness  
And wept each other’s tears.”*

# Love Is Exclusive

Now we come to a fourth quality of love: love is exclusive. Let's go right to the Song of Solomon.

In chapter 2, the girl says,

*"My lover is mine and I am his"* (Song of Solomon 2:16, NIV).

These are the words of lovers completely wrapped up in each other. They care about nothing else around them.

In chapter 6, the king says,

*"Let the king have sixty queens, eighty concubines, young women without number! But I love only one, and she is as lovely as a dove"* (Song of Solomon 6:8, 9, TEV).

To the king, it doesn't matter how many other beautiful women there are in the palace. He's in love with only one. And so the conversation goes in this poem. Over and over they say to each other "I am yours" and "You are mine." They feel that they belong to each other, that they were made exclusively for each other.

In chapter 8, the girl says,

*"Close your heart to every love but mine; hold no one in your arms but me"* (Song of Solomon 8:6a, TEV).

Exclusive love ties two people together in a very special way.

Unfortunately, Solomon himself didn't live up to this ideal. But his goal was proper. True love is exclusive.

One man put it this way:

*"To love is to choose and be chosen; to know and to be known; to be at one, with one alone."*

When two people want to love each other in this way, it's time to get married. A Christian marriage, then, is an exclusive relationship.

Two lovers make a commitment of utter loyalty to each other. The book of Genesis makes this very clear.

*"Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh"* (Genesis 2:24, KJV).

Notice that a person must *leave* one family to begin another. As a child, a person must be loyal to his parents. But when that child gets married, his highest human loyalty goes to the spouse, not the parents.

The last phrase of that verse in Genesis is important, too. Marriage partners become "one flesh." I believe that the sexual relationship symbolizes the exclusive nature of Christian marriage.

This means that sex before marriage—or outside marriage—is completely unacceptable, because it takes the symbol of special loyalty to one person, and uses it outside that relationship. When the symbol is abused, then the exclusive nature of the marriage is damaged.

You see, marriage is a unity, a complete unity of body, soul, spirit, and heart. In one of Oscar Wilde's plays, some-

one defines love as "the union of two minds, two souls, two hearts, in all they think, and hope and feel" (*In a Florentine Tragedy*).

To violate that unity on any level, breaks the exclusive nature of the relationship. C. S. Lewis, in *Mere Christianity* writes:

*"The monstrosity of sexual intercourse outside marriage, is that those who indulge in it are trying to isolate one kind of union (the sexual) from all the other kinds of union which were intended to go along with it and make up the total union."*

A Christian marriage is a unity. Two people really do become one. They offer themselves completely to each other—their emotions, their hopes, their time, their affections.

There's nothing negative about this exclusive arrangement. A commitment of loyalty that will last until death is a beautiful thing. Trust, security, peace—all kinds of good things can follow such a commitment.

Unfortunately, many people disagree. They think that when you get tired of someone, you should go find another partner.

This attitude is based on a false assumption. People assume that when the first thrills of marriage lessen, love has died.

But that's not true. Because the thrills will go out of the next relationship, too. And the next one after that.

When the early excitement becomes less intense, it doesn't leave a vacuum. Other things take its place.

Again, a thought from C. S. Lewis in *Mere Christianity*:

*"Let the thrill go . . . and you will find you are living in a world of new thrills all the time."*

For a three-year-old, the first trip to the swimming pool can be very exciting—all the noise, the splashing, the paddling. But as he gets older, the excitement of dog-paddling fades. But he doesn't get out of the pool and decide never to go back. No. He learns to swim. Then to dive.

Love is like that, too. At first, it's all romance. Everything is roses and candlelight. The feelings are intense, full of wonder, excitement, and mystery.

Eventually the excitement changes. But that doesn't mean that love has ended! It only means that love is growing.

There's more to love than a honeymoon. Love doesn't disappear when the early thrills fade; it's only replaced by other thrills like security, trust, companionship and growth. The longer it continues, the deeper and steadier it becomes.

So if you've lost the heart-stopping excitement of your first week of marriage, don't decide that you've fallen out of love. Don't go looking for a new partner, either.

Just remember that an exclusive relationship offers its own pleasures.

Bayard Taylor has a poem that captures the feel of this commitment. It's called, *The Bedouin Song*.

*"I love thee, I love but thee  
With a love that shall not die  
Till the sun grows cold  
And the stars are old  
And the leaves of the Judgment Book unfold!"*

Many wedding ceremonies still use the traditional vows. The minister asks:

*"Wilt thou have this man to be thy wedded husband, to live together after God's ordinance in the sacred estate of matrimony? Wilt thou love, honor, and cherish him, in sickness and in health, in prosperity or adversity; and forsaking all others, keep thee only unto him, so long as ye both shall live?"*

Now this is a high commitment, isn't it? An exclusive commitment. God help all of us who've made that commitment, to keep it, to nurture it, and to protect it.



## Love Is Strong

Have you ever noticed how lovers are always saying that their love is going to last forever? Cynics tend to laugh at such remarks—and sometimes they have a good reason to laugh. But not always. Real love is permanent.

So far, we've discovered four things about love in the Song of Solomon. Love is natural. Love is romantic. Love is redemptive. And love is exclusive.

A fifth characteristic is found in these verses, near the end of the poem.

*“Love is as strong as death, its jealousy unyielding as the grave. . . . Many waters cannot quench love; rivers cannot wash it away”* (Song of Solomon 8:6, 7a, NIV).

That reminds me of something the apostle Paul said. Love—

*“Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Charity never faileth”* (1 Corinthians 13:7, 8a, KJV).

Love is strong, invincible, unbending. Love doesn't die quietly.

One of Shakespeare's best-known sonnets (*Sonnet CXVI*) begins this way:

*“Let me not to the marriage of true minds  
Admit impediments. Love is not love  
Which alters when it alteration finds. . . .  
O no! it is an ever-fixed mark  
That looks on tempest and is never shaken.”*

Poets have written some beautiful lines about the strength of love. Like Robert Browning, the English poet who lived in the 19th century:

*“Chance cannot change my love,  
nor time impair.”*

Or Rudyard Kipling:

*“Sing the Lover's Litany  
'Love like ours can never die!'"*

Or Tennyson's comment in *The Princess*:

*“O tell her, brief is life  
but love is long.”*

On and on the poets write. Love is strong. Love is permanent.

And really, it's good to think about love in this way. After all, God's love is unbreakable.

*“For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord”* (Romans 8:38, 39, KJV).

You know, we often say human love is as strong as death. And many times it is.

But God's love is stronger than death. Nothing can separate us from His love; not even death.

I can't think of a better example of love than the cross. Christ died because He loved us. Because He wanted the best for us. Because He wanted us to live forever. Love is stronger than death.

That's the goal of human love, too. We don't always reach it, but it *is* the goal.

When two people take their vows before the Creator, they're saying, "Our love is permanent. As long as we live—"till death do us part"—we shall love."

And I think God blesses a vow like that. He helps lovers through the rough spots, encouraging them, guiding them, loving them.

Once there was a community leader whose wife became a prostitute. As surprising as it seemed to everyone, this prominent woman became so degraded that even her customers eventually left her alone.

She decided she had nothing to lose, so she went back to her husband. Another surprise. He took her back. He forgave her. He welcomed her back as his wife.

That's love. Strong love. This story was such a good example that it got included in the Bible itself. You can read it in the book of Hosea.

It's this kind of love, strong and unwavering, that makes a marriage last. A Christian marriage cannot begin with any reservations.

A man and woman can never say, "Let's try marriage and see how it works." No. A marriage commitment is a permanent one. It begins with a commitment to last as long as the partners live.

The Bible's word for this is "covenant." A covenant in

Bible times was a solemn promise that bound people together.

Sometimes God Himself made the covenant. After the flood, for example, God made a covenant with Noah. Notice how long this covenant was to last. God said:

*"I do set my bow in the cloud . . . and I will look upon it, that I may remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature"*  
(Genesis 9:13, 16a, KJV).

An *everlasting* covenant. The agreement was to be permanent. We see this again in God's commitment to Abraham, found in Genesis 17:7:

*" . . . I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you . . . "* (NIV).

Covenants in the Bible were not to be temporary. They were designed to be permanent.

Breaking these covenants was a serious matter. When Israel later broke its covenant with God, for example, and decided to worship false gods, the prophet Malachi said that God would no longer respond to Israel's prayers. Malachi explains why in chapter 2, verse 14:

*"It is because the Lord is acting as the witness between you and the wife of your youth, because you have broken faith with her, though she is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant"* (NIV).

Notice the last two words in that verse. Marriage covenant. It was to last forever. Just as God's love to *us* is

permanent, so our commitment to a marriage partner must be permanent.

The same idea appears in the Proverbs, where men are advised to avoid the adulteress

*"... who has left the partner of her youth and ignored the covenant she made before God"* (Proverbs 2:17, NIV).

A marriage commitment is a covenant. In fact, God often thinks of His relationship to us in terms of a marriage. Spiritually speaking, we are God's beloved, His bride, His marriage partners. Isaiah 62:5 says,

*"... as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so will your God rejoice over you..."* (NIV).

The word that keeps coming to my mind is "strength." Christian love is strong. I really like the words of that old song called, *Will You Love Me in December as You Do in May?* It was written back in 1905:

*"Will you love me in December  
as you do in May,  
Will you love me in the good  
old-fashioned way?  
When my hair has all turned gray,  
Will you kiss me then and say,  
That you love me in December  
as you do in May?"*

And that brings us back to that marvelous conclusion found in the Song of Solomon:

*"Close your heart to every love but mine;  
hold no one in your arms but me.  
Love is as powerful as death;  
passion is as strong as death itself.  
It bursts into flame  
and burns like a raging fire,  
Water cannot put it out;  
no flood can drown it"* (Song of Solomon 8:6, 7a, TEV).

That's love, my friend. Christian love. Close, romantic, redemptive, exclusive, and strong.