

“I CHOOSE TO FORGIVE YOU”

AVOIDING AND ENDING A LOVER’S QUARREL

Let’s be honest. Reading, studying, and understanding the Song of Solomon is great, but aren’t you starting to wonder if these descriptions of Biblical marriage are really possible for a couple to attain? Even though we would applaud and honor them for their faithfulness and devotion, when compared to our own experience, it probably all sounds too good to be true. If you have found yourself struggling to relate to Solomon and the Shulamite in their love, you may find it easier to identify with them in this next section. At this point in the Song of Solomon, having watched this couple endure the trials and temptations of premarital love, express the affection and commitment of their marital love, and finally enjoy the amazing bliss and euphoria of sexual satisfaction, you would expect that the next scene would be one where the couple is off in some romantic getaway, exploring new ways to engage in the thrills of romance. Perhaps if we were writing the song, we might pick up the story next with the new couple holding a baby and beginning the next phase of their lives building a family. But they aren’t. When the next scene opens in **5:2**, it is obvious that something has gone wrong. There is trouble in paradise. This couple who has had it all until now, realize that there is one important feature of their relationship that they have not heretofore had the privilege to experience – the essential bonding, maturing, and deepening that can only come after a good, hard fight.

In this section we learn that even the ideal couple, with all of their amiable qualities, experience what all married couples face – the reality of sin and its potentially damaging effects on a relationship. However, conflict is not necessarily a bad thing. It sounds odd to say it this way, but while sin is a bad thing and quarrels are serious, a couple who has not experienced the challenge of intense conflict in their marriage has not had their commitment truly tested, nor has that relationship had the opportunity to mature (**Proverbs 27:17**).

This is encouraging for us, because in giving us the standard for what righteous, godly, romantic relationships should look like, God helps us with our expectations – here it is: Your. Partner. Will. Sin. And so will you! But if you don’t know how to respond when conflict arises, your marriage will get in serious trouble, fast. Thankfully, God gives us an example of what to anticipate and how to pull out of it when disagreements, arguments, and unmet expectations arise. Here is Solomon, the wisest man who ever lived next to Jesus Christ, showing us how to recognize and relieve the tension of a lover’s quarrel. Ideally we could all get ahead of marital conflicts by living according to the principle in **Proverbs 17:14**, “**abandon the quarrel before it breaks out,**” but that is not always the case. In marriage, conflicts are inevitable. Marriage is what happens when two sinners say, “I do.” *This study is designed to help you recognize the early warning signs of a serious conflict and reconcile with your lover so that you can avoid, escape, and mature past a lover’s quarrel.*

1. RECOGNIZING THE WARNING SIGNS (5:2-6)

Throughout this section, both Solomon and his wife manifest selfishness and demonstrate how NOT to relate to each other, but by their example, evidence four warning signs that help you know that you are approaching or engaged in a conflict.

A. R_____ (5:2)

- 1) In **5:2**, the Shulamite describes the condition of her heart as she slept – what is it?
- 2) According to **v. 2**, what time to day or night is this interaction?
- 3) What does the fact that he is “**knocking**” at this hour imply?
- 4) What do we know about the nature of the conflict from the text? Why is that important?
- 5) What is Solomon’s attitude as he approaches his wife? Why do you think he is speaking in these terms and what does it suggest about his intent?
- 6) What does this uneasiness say about the health of a relationship where a couple is stuck in a conflict?
- 7) What happens when a couple does not feel disturbed about their conflict?

B. S_____ (5:3)

- 1) What does the fact that Solomon has been locked out of his bedroom imply about the attitude of the Shulamite towards him?
- 2) What message has this action (locking him out) sent to him?
- 3) How does the fact that she makes excuses in **v. 3** rather than letting him in further entrench the conflict?

- 4) What does it reveal about her heart that is dangerous in any relational context? Why is it so dangerous?
- 5) What is another word to describe this inner stiffness, which is so serious and destructive to relationships?
- 6) How does **Hebrews 12:15** warn us about this sin?

C. R_____ (5:3)

- 1) In **v. 3**, what two excuses does the Shulamite make as to why she cannot (will not) open the door for her husband?
- 2) Why is the first excuse so absurd, especially in light of the context?
- 3) What does this say about the intrusion of marital conflict upon marital intimacy?
- 4) What ancient custom is the Shulamite referring to in the second excuse and why was it needed in Bible times?
- 5) What is she really saying to her “**beloved**” man?
- 6) Why are rude words and actions so devastating to a marriage partner (cf. also **1 Corinthians 13:4-8a**)?

D. A_____ (5:4-6)

- 1) What action does Solomon take in **v. 4** that speaks of his persistence to reconcile? What does this say about his character and heart?
- 2) When the Shulamite finally decided to move towards her husband, what was the result in **v. 5-6**?

- 3) How does the grammar of the Hebrew intensify this moment?
- 4) How has Solomon now added to and complicated the conflict?
- 5) What is his response to her cries for him to return?
- 6) What does **Proverbs 18:1** say about our hearts when we withdraw from one another?

2. RECONCILING WITH YOUR LOVER (5:4-6:3)

Having identified evidences of selfishness in the midst of an unresolved conflict, this couple now models four ways to reconcile with one another:

A. GET _____ AND LOOK PAST _____ (5:4-7)!

- 1) When the Shulamite saw Solomon’s hand extend through the opening, what does the text say happened in her heart (v. 4)?
- 2) What does this mean that she had to be willing to do in order to begin to reconcile?
- 3) What rekindled and renewed affection does she recall having in her soul when he spoke, according to v. 6?
- 4) What actions does she take in v. 7 and how does this suggest that she is oblivious to anything other than reconciliation?
- 5) What is different in this encounter that is different from 3:1-4?
- 6) In this moment, who is she thinking about most and least?

B. GET _____ AND RENEW YOUR _____ (5:8-9)!

- 1) According to v. 8, where does the Shulamite go when she has run out of options and ideas for how to reach her man and reconcile with him?

- 2) What role have they served in her life and their relationship in the past, which gives her confidence that they can be a help now?
- 3) What does this teach about the ability and priority of getting counsel if you are *stuck* in a marital conflict?
- 4) What kind of counsel do the **“daughters of Jerusalem”** give to her in **v. 9** and what makes their words so wise?
- 5) What does this also suggest about the need for counsel, even among the wisest of the wise?
- 6) Write down the name of at least two trusted Christian friends that you can call if you are ever in a place where you need someone to speak truth to you, where in humbling yourself and submitting to their counsel, you can find fresh perspective:

C. GET _____ AND BE _____ (5:10-16)!

- 1) Now that the Shulamite is asking her heart the right questions about her lover, notice what expressions of gratitude flow from her lips (in contrast to what might be a temptation to complain about his flaws):
 - **v. 10 “My beloved is dazzling and ruddy, Outstanding among ten thousand.”**
 - **v. 11 “His head is like gold, pure gold; His locks are like clusters of dates And black as a raven.”**
 - **v. 12 “His eyes are like doves Beside streams of water, Bathed in milk, And reposed in their setting.”**
 - **v. 13 “His cheeks are like a bed of balsam, Banks of sweet-scented herbs; His lips are lilies Dripping with liquid myrrh.”**
 - **v. 14 “His hands are rods of gold Set with beryl; His abdomen is carved ivory Inlaid with sapphires.”**

- v. 15 **“His legs are pillars of alabaster Set on pedestals of pure gold; His appearance is like Lebanon Choice as the cedars.”**

- v. 16 **“His mouth is full of sweetness. And he is wholly desirable.”**

2) Of all the things she has said about her man, what one description at the end v. 16 characterizes her attitude and longing for Solomon?

D. GET _____ AND MAKE IT _____ (6:1-3)!

- 1) Still speaking to the **“daughters of Jerusalem”** in 6:1, what question do they ask her and how far are they willing to go to help them reconcile?

- 2) What answer does she give in v. 2 and what does it reveal about how well she knows her husband? Is this literal or figurative?

- 3) Where has Solomon gone and what does this suggest about the kinds of places we go and things we do if we are not reconciled with our mates?

- 4) What confidence does she exude in v. 3 about her man and how it will go when she sees him next?

- 5) Even though poetically, Solomon’s response begins a new and concluding section of this love song, what kind of attitude does he bring to the reconciliation that assures you that this process will go well (6:4ff)?

TAKING IT HOME AND MAKING IT REAL

- A. Would you consider yourself a forgiving person or a bitter person? Is there anything right now in your relationship to your partner (or anyone for that matter) that is left unresolved and in which there is a need for reconciliation? If so, take seriously the steps outlined in this study and “do not let the sun go down” on it (**Ephesians 4:26**; cf. **Matthew 5:21-26**).

- B. Consider one of the following resources on Biblical conflict resolution:
 - Ken Sande, *Peacemaking for Families*
 - Ken Sande, *Peacemaker*

C. This section of the Song of Solomon models attitudes and actions that move a couple towards reconciliation. It is not however, a completely exhaustive teaching on the subject of Biblical forgiveness. That is, a couple who truly seeks to honor God in their marriage should add to their understanding, a more complete awareness of forgiveness and reconciliation. Consider what the following verses have to say, for further study:

1) What should be the standard of our forgiveness towards one another?

➤ **Matthew 5:9**

➤ **Ephesians 4:32-5:1**

➤ **Colossians 3:12-13**

2) In what way does God through Christ forgive us?

➤ **Psalms 32:1-2, 5**

➤ **Psalms 103:1-3, 10-12**

➤ **Isaiah 1:18**

➤ **Isaiah 44:22**

➤ **Ezekiel 18:21-22**

➤ **Luke 15:11-24**

3) What is a Biblical definition of God’s forgiveness?

<p>FORGIVENESS IS GOD’S PROMISE TO COVER SIN, THAT HE WILL NEVER BRING THEM UP TO US IN THOUGHT, WORD, OR DEED IN A WAY THAT WOULD EVER NEGATIVELY AFFECT OUR RELATIONSHIP TO HIM.</p>

4) Are there times when God calls to remembrance our past life of sin for a positive reason, or asks us to remember them?

➤ **Ephesians 2:11-13**

➤ **Philippians 3:4-10**

➤ **1 Timothy 1:12-17**

➤ **Revelation 5:9**

5) What is the condition for our forgiveness to others and how is it like God’s forgiveness to us?

➤ **Luke 17:3-4**

➤ **2 Corinthians 2:5-10**

6) Can you think of a time when you are required to remember the sins of another because it negatively has affected your relationship with them? In other words, are there times when you should not forgive the sins of your brother? (**Matthew 18:15-18**)

7) When is unforgiveness a sin?

➤ **Proverbs 17:9**

➤ **Mark 11:25-26**

➤ **Matthew 18:21-35**

8) What are the possible consequences of bitterness?

➤ **2 Corinthians 2:10-11**

➤ **Matthew 6:15**

➤ **Hebrews 12:15**

9) What should you do if you are not reconciled with your brother or sister in Christ according to **Matthew 5:23-24**?

10) What if you ask for forgiveness and are refused?

➤ **Romans 12:18-21**

➤ **Luke 15:20 (cf. Psalm 86:5)**

➤ **Matthew 5:38-48**