

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

MEMORY VERSE: SONG OF SONGS 6:1

- **READ** Song of Songs 5:2–8:14, First Thoughts (p. 134), and Understand the Context (pp. 134–135). Visualize the emotions and descriptions as you read the poetic language. Review **PACK ITEM 14** (*Handout: Interpreting Song of Songs*).
- **STUDY** Song of Songs 5:6-16, using Explore the Text (pp. 135–139). Note the hurt at the beginning of the passage, the possible abuse, and the transition to desire at the end of the chapter. Reflect on the similarities and differences in a marriage relationship and our relationship with God.
- **PLAN** the group time using ideas under Lead Group Bible Study (pp. 140–141) and More Ideas (p. 142). Consult *QuickSource* or goExploreTheBible.com/LeaderHelps for additional ideas. Customize a plan to meet the needs of your group.
- **GAIN** insights from the weekly podcast on Ministry Grid (MinistryGrid.com/ExploretheBible) or on iTunes.
- **GATHER** the following items: Personal Study Guides; A board or chart paper and markers; and The board game “The Game of Life®.” Prepare to display the following Pack Items: **PACK ITEM 5** (*Poster: Cedars of Lebanon*); and **PACK ITEM 6** (*Key Verse: Proverbs 1:7a*). Make copies of: **PACK ITEM 14** (*Handout: Interpreting Song of Songs*).



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).

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?

FIRST THOUGHTS

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.

(In PSG, p. 118) **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

The man and the woman in the poem are now married and 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. 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 (Song of Sgs. 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 privately with her about her beauty. He described her with words pictures that captured the depth of his love for her and his longing to be 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 (2:16). They were completely committed to each other, and their mutual commitment allowed them to give themselves to each other without any reservation (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 location far away from his work. 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).

EXPLORE THE TEXT

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

VERSE 6

The episode that begins with this verse could have been 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. She wanted him and needed him, but he wasn't there. Her **heart** broke over his apparently mysterious and sudden departure. Frantically, she began to look for him everywhere but **did not find him**. She **called** out his name in the hope he would return to her, but he didn't **answer**. Her heart yearned to hear his voice when she called him, and the silence in response only added to her despair. She didn't hear from him, and he didn't come back to her.

The dream so far painted a picture of a spouse who felt as if she had been deserted. She was left by herself in the sense that he wasn't physically there with her. She looked forward to being with him once more. His continued physical absence only added more pain to her broken heart. However, the picture also shows the pain that comes from being deserted emotionally. Their marriage needed one another's physical presence, and it also required them to provide each other with emotional support. With it, they could look forward to growing together in a mutually fulfilling relationship. Without it, a spouse could be left to feel abandoned.

VERSE 7

The description of what next happened to the woman continues to give the impression she must have been dreaming. In reality, she married Solomon, the king of Israel. For that reason, she probably would not have been mistreated by the **guards**. In her dream, however, they wounded her and then disgraced her.

She encountered the guards as she went through the city in search of her true love who had disappeared. She also had an encounter with guards in a dream she had before she was married (3:3). In her telling of the dream she had after her wedding, she described the cruelty of the guards. Once they **found** her, they didn't try to help her. Instead, they beat her, leaving her with painful wounds. Then they took her **cloak** away from her.

BIBLICAL ILLUSTRATOR

For additional context, read "Understanding the Song of Songs," an archived *Biblical Illustrator* article provided via digital download in the Summer 2020 *Explore the Bible Leader Pack*.

VERSE 6

⁶ I opened to my love, but my love had turned and gone away. My heart sank because he had left. I sought him, but did not find him. I called him, but he did not answer.

VERSE 7

⁷ The guards who go about the city found me. They beat and wounded me; they took my cloak from me — the guardians of the walls.

The beating she endured probably served as a figurative way to describe the deep emotional pain she felt over the mysterious departure of her true love. His disappearance had left her wounded by disappointment, despair, confusion, and perhaps regret. Being left alone without her husband broke her heart. Not being able to find him left her broken hearted, beaten up, and in severe agony.

Along with the wounds, the **guardians** exposed her to a painful kind of disgrace for a young woman back then. They took away her cloak, a garment that mattered quite a bit to her. Her cloak covered her. Without it, she would be left exposed. In the days of the Old Testament, a woman covered herself with a cloak, a shawl, or a veil as a gesture of modesty as well as protection from the harsh sun.

VERSE 8

⁸ Young women of Jerusalem, I charge you, if you find my love, tell him that I am lovesick.

VERSE 8

When the woman sought the help of the **young women of Jerusalem**, she acknowledged her eagerness to rejoin her husband. She charged them with the task of helping her to find him and sending a message to him that she loved him. The urgency of her plea suggested the depth of her desire to reconcile with him. Neither her wounded heart nor the torment she suffered at the hands of the guards could persuade her to give up on him. She would never be able to think about getting on with her life without him because she loved him dearly. Six times in this chapter she referred to him 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. In other words, she was **lovesick** and would only be cured by the return of her husband.

Marriages can get into trouble when spouses are distant from each other emotionally even though they're present physically.

The painful cry of the woman sheds light on the need for couples to work at their marriage relationship by being present for each other. Marriages can get into trouble when spouses are distant from each other emotionally even though they're present physically. Being intentional about being there for each other makes a marriage stronger.

Under what circumstances have you noticed how emotional and moral support strengthens a marriage?

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

VERSE 9

We would expect the women of Jerusalem to carry out the woman's order. That kind of response would have been in keeping with their role in the poem so far. But instead of accommodating her, they asked her to tell them why her true love was **better than** any other man. With their question, a valid issue to be addressed in marriage relationships is brought to light.

The young women of Jerusalem have appeared at strategic moments throughout the poem. At the outset of the poem, the woman introduced herself to them (1:5). She urged them three times to wait until the right time before they awakened love (2:7; 3:5; 8:4). Special attention had been given to decorating Solomon's carriage for the wedding day. The young women of Jerusalem had lovingly woven the cloth that covered the couch (3:10). The woman asked the young women to send a message to her true love (5:8), and she shared with them that her true love was also her friend (5:16).

Almost always, the young women of Jerusalem responded by listening or assisting the woman. In this verse alone, however, they responded differently. She directed them to send a message to her true love that she was lovesick for him. They replied by asking her a probing question that would prompt her to spend some time in reflection. Reflecting on her answer would require her to go back to the day when she met him and the time they spent together since then. It would also take her back to their wedding day and the night that followed. But most likely, it would direct her to the moment in which she devoted herself to him alone. Her exclusive commitment to him galvanized her unwavering love for him that took the shape of a lasting investment in their marriage.

The question raised by the young women of Jerusalem deserves to be taken seriously by believers today. What makes a wife certain that her husband is better than another? By the same token, what prompts a husband to believe that his wife rises above any other woman?

The answer to such questions can only be found in the bedrock commitments a husband and wife make to each other in marriage. These commitments serve as the foundation of the couple's relationship. Accordingly, the strength of the marriage depends on the willingness of the couple to invest in those commitments for the rest of their lives. For that reason, the vows repeated on the wedding day serve as much more than mere ceremonial statements that have little more than sentimental value. They testify that the couple will make investments in their marriage as long as they live.

The central commitment in marriage for Christian couples involves a mutual devotion to the Lord. Their joint loyalty to Him matters most of all. If they intend to grow in love for each other, they're wise to focus on growing in God's love for them and expressing it in their relationship with each other. Otherwise, their love for one another becomes little more than an emotional response to one another. That kind of love runs the risk of diminishing over time and perhaps even disappearing altogether.

VERSE 9

⁹ What makes the one you love better than another, most beautiful of women? What makes him better than another, that you would give us this charge?

Christian couples demonstrate their investment in each other by staying faithful to one another. Nothing or nobody should be able to tear apart a man and a woman who have given themselves and their marriage to the Lord. A commitment to faithfulness might be taken for granted as long as no challenges or temptations wedge into the couple's relationship. But marriages are faced with challenges, and temptations to stray from faithfulness can come along when a couple least expects them. That's when their commitment to faithfulness turns into determined resolve to push through the challenges and steer clear of the temptations.

How has God's love at work in you enabled you to push through the challenges you face in relationships?

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

VERSES 10-12

VERSES 10-12

¹⁰ My love is fit and strong, notable among ten thousand. ¹¹ His head is purest gold. His hair is wavy and black as a raven. ¹² His eyes are like doves beside flowing streams, washed in milk and set like jewels.

The woman declared to the young women of Jerusalem that she loved the man, and she demonstrated her love with her eagerness to find him. She went on to tell them what she saw in him. She started with the way he looked as he stood before her. She considered him to be **fit and strong**. In her eyes, he was extremely handsome. She added that he was an outstanding man who distinguished himself above **ten thousand** other men. Then starting from his **head**, she painted a picture of him with words selected from a heart full of love. She noted that his head gleamed like **purest gold**, which implied that he was tanned or that he was priceless to her. His **hair** was **wavy** and **black**. It gave the indication that he was robust and energetic, not weak or weary.

She provided a number of rich details as she talked about **his eyes**. The details gave the impression she may have lost herself in them many times throughout their relationship. His eyes captivated her because she loved him so much. She compared his eyes with **doves**, birds that symbolized tranquility, gentleness, and peace. Doves looked particularly gentle as they perched near **flowing streams**. At the same time, they gave every evidence that they were alert to everything going on around them. By saying that his eyes had been **washed in milk**, she was referring to the whites of his eyes. The whites of his eyes added to the color and texture of his pupils. Every time she took a long look at his face and gazed into his beautiful eyes, she thought that they looked like precious **jewels** that had been **set** perfectly in a ring or a necklace.

VERSES 13-16

When she compared his *cheeks* to *beds of spice*, she may have been referring to the fragrance of his cologne. Every time he put it on his cheeks, the lovely scent resembled *mounds* of sweet-smelling herbs. In this part of her description, she began to bring up more than just the way he looked. She flavored her observations with her sense of smell and taste. That's particularly noticeable as she described his *lips*. She compared them with *lilies*, but not necessarily because of their color. Lilies were white, and his lips would have been red. Most likely, the comparison had to do with the attractiveness of his lips. Lilies were thought to be perfectly beautiful. She went on to say his lips dripped *flowing myrrh*. A fragrant spice that dripped from the bark of a bush grown in Arabia, myrrh was used in perfumes and anointing oils.

The man she loved had strong, well-shaped *arms* that had the value and appearance of *gold*, perhaps because they were well-tanned. *Beryl* was a precious stone that resembled an emerald. The Lord commanded Moses to place beryl on the breastplates of the high priest (Ex. 28:20). When she mentioned his *body*, she may have been referring to his abdomen. She compared it to an *ivory panel* in that it was rock-hard and smooth. *Lapis lazuli* was a mixture of minerals that had the blue-green color of a sapphire. Moses wrote that it served as pavement under God's feet when the elders of Israel met Him on the mountain (Ex. 24:10). The woman added that the strong legs of her true love reminded her of *alabaster* or marble *pillars*. The *cedars of Lebanon* were well known for their towering beauty as they stood majestically on the mountains there. The scene served her well to portray the presence of the man she loved.

When she said that his mouth was *sweetness*, she may have been referring to his kisses. Or she could have been implying that what he said to her was sweet. She considered her true love to be most charming and *absolutely desirable*. Just as important to her, he was her true *friend*. The two blessings—romance and friendship—resulted from their investment in each other. She honored their friendship as much as she relished their romance. Their romantic relationship would grow and change across the years. Their friendship would grow stronger too. Because she considered him to be her friend, she knew that she could count on him to be there for her no matter what happened in their future. She would be there for him too.

In what ways do you notice Christian couples expressing their admiration of each other?

VERSES 13-16

¹³ His cheeks are like beds of spice, mounds of perfume. His lips are lilies, dripping with flowing myrrh. ¹⁴ His arms are rods of gold set with beryl. His body is an ivory panel covered with lapis lazuli. ¹⁵ His legs are alabaster pillars set on pedestals of pure gold. His presence is like Lebanon, as majestic as the cedars. ¹⁶ His mouth is sweetness. He is absolutely desirable. This is my love, and this is my friend, young women of Jerusalem.

LEAD GROUP BIBLE STUDY

FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)

INTRODUCE: If available, call attention to a display of the board game “The Game of Life.” If you have the game, you might choose to display it. As the group arrives, share the following: *“The Game of Life” was originally created in 1860, but a modern version was published 100 years later in 1960. Since 1960, the game has been revised multiple times. A recent revision in 2018 includes peps and squares for acquiring pets. In the game, players travel along a track where, based on their spins, they get an education, a career, houses, marriage, children, and pets. The game has stood the test of time because just like in our lives, choices and experiences affect us as we move toward retirement.*

ASK: *How might a person’s investments reveal their stage in life? What might a person’s investments reveal about their priorities?* (PSG, p. 118)

TRANSITION: *In today’s session in Song of Songs we’ll see how our relationships require a continual investment on our parts to remain healthy.*

EXPLORE THE TEXT

REVIEW: Provide the group with a brief review of **Pack Item 14** (*Handout: Interpreting Song of Songs*) that was distributed in the last session. Remind the group that the previous session focused on a love moving toward marriage. Today’s session focuses on the time after the wedding.

READ: Enlist a volunteer to read Song of Songs 5:6-8, as the group listens to identify the problems arising within the marriage.

IDENTIFY: Lead the group to identify the problems they identified by referencing a specific word, phrase, or sentence from the text. Point the group to the PSG for insight.

DRAW: On a board, draw a two-column chart labeling one side *Spouse* and one side *God*.

ASK: *How might the failure of a spouse to meet the emotional needs of the other lead to greater issues?* (PSG, p. 121) *How might the spouse’s search for companionship be compared to a person’s search for God and meaning?* (PSG, p. 122)

RECORD: As the group responds to the questions, record on the board problems that affect the relationship between spouses or with God. Write *Cry for Companionship* across both sides of the chart.

READ: Direct someone to read aloud Song of Songs 5:9, as the group considers how they would respond to the question of what makes the one you love better than another.

DISCUSS: Lead the group to turn to a neighbor and share how they would respond to one of the following questions: *Why were you attracted to your spouse in the beginning? How did your relationship with God begin?*

ASK: *What is the value of retelling stories when it comes to building and maintaining relationships?* (PSG, p. 123)

WRITE: Across the columns write *The Call for Remembering*.

READ: Identify someone to read Song of Songs 5:10-16, as the group listens for the woman's response to the question of what makes her love so special.

LIST: Lead the group to identify the characteristics expressed in the verses. Record the characteristics identified under the column labeled *Spouse*. Point to **Pack Item 5** (*Poster: Cedars of Lebanon*) as an illustration for verse 15. Emphasize from the PSG (p. 124): *There will be seasons when the physical dimension of a marriage will be less important than the friendship dimension of marriage*. Solicit responses to the comment.

GUIDE: Lead the group to consider how they would respond to the question, *What makes your relationship with God special?* Record responses under the column labeled *God*.

ASK: *What are some appropriate ways for husbands and wives to express their admiration for each other?* (PSG, p. 125) *What are some appropriate ways for believers to express their love for God?*

WRITE: On the board across both columns write *The Crux for Celebrating*.

REREAD: Enlist a volunteer to reread Song of Songs 5:16, guiding the group to listen for key words and phrases.

ASK: *Why is being a friend important in any relationship? In a marital relationship? With God?*

TRANSITION: *Today, as we've examined the verses in Song of Songs, we see that each of us has a longing for relationships in our homes and with God. It's critical that we remember the beauty of a new relationship while celebrating our time-honored relationships.*

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)

COMPARE: Say: *The session outline points written across both sides of the chart are true for marriage relationships and our relationship with God*. Discuss the similarities and differences between the two columns of the chart developed during the session. Utilize the bulleted points on page 126 of the PSG for further evaluation.

EVALUATE: *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?* (PSG, p. 126)

CHALLENGE: Reread Song of Songs 5:16. Call for volunteers to paraphrase the verse to explain how they would describe their love for their spouse or their love for God. (Be prepared to share your own example.)

REFLECT: Point to **Pack Item 6** (*Key Verse: Proverbs 1:7a*). Stress that we need God's wisdom to make good decisions in all our relationships. Guide each person in the group to determine one action they will take to affirm and strengthen their relationship with their spouse or with God during the next week.

PRAY: Offer a prayer of thanksgiving to God for creating us for relationship with others and with Him. Pray that God will lead us to protect our relationships in both word and action. Ask Him to help us consistently invest in building our relationships. Thank Him for the gift of love He provided through His Son, Jesus Christ.



PRACTICE

- Continue to prayerfully evaluate your own marriage and your relationship with Christ.
- Be sure that everyone has a Personal Study Guide for the Fall 2020 study.
- Text each group member during the week to let them know you're praying for them. Be specific if you're aware of a special need.

MORE IDEAS

FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)

As an alternate option for First Thoughts, play, read aloud, or distribute copies of the lyrics of Elvis Presley's song, "Love Me Tender." Lead the group to note characteristics of love in the song and the duration of the love. Transition to Explore the Text on page 140 by relating that today's session focuses on lasting love and the importance of investing in our relationships.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

- To support the application of Song of Songs 5:6-16, select the case study most appropriate for your group. (1) Matt and Angie have been married for twenty years. They have two children. Matt's job is requiring more and more hours, but he knows he is being considered for a promotion, so he doesn't ever want to say no. Angie is busy with the children, but she resents Matt's late hours away from the family. Identify actions that might support Matt and Angie during this stressful time. (2) Rachel is a young adult who recently broke up with her fiancé. She has withdrawn from many of her relationships, including her relationship with God. Identify actions that might support Rachel and draw her back into a more meaningful relationship with God.
- Lead the group to examine Song of Songs 5:10-15 and list the body parts in the order they are included. Then discuss: *Why is it important to value all parts of your relationship with your spouse or with God? How can we keep from becoming complacent or taking these relationships for granted?*
- Reread Song of Songs 5:16 and discuss why the mouth might come later in the description. Could this reveal the power of our words on our relationships?

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)

If appropriate for your group, take time to discuss how sin can affect our relationships—emotionally and physically. Lead in a discussion of the first question set on page 126 of the PSG: *Discuss as a group ways of responding to abuse. How can the group provide support to people experiencing abuse or who have experienced abuse?*

SUGGESTED MUSIC IDEA

To close the session, play a recording of "Unfailing Love," by Jimmy Needham. Remind the group that we're called to exhibit unfailing love in our marriages and in our relationship with God.