



## Love Isn't Blind

Song of Songs 1:5-17

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During COVID-19 lockdown two years ago, a popular Netflix show was released that became the networks number one stream for a few weeks. Since then, the show has two more seasons, and international spin-offs in several countries. It's a reality show that hit home with a wide variety of people, because its message was very specific and in a way, relatable.<sup>1</sup> The show is called "Love is Blind". The premise is simple and terrifying: around 20 strangers are brought into a large complex where for several days they go on "dates" in secluded "pods" where they can hear one another, but can't see one another. There are only two ways to get out of the pods: one, you leave alone, without seeing or meeting the men or women you've been speaking to. The other, you get engaged, sight unseen, and leave for a vacation with your new fiancée.

The idea is a kind of experiment: can two people fall in love without seeing each other? Can they get engaged and make it all the way to the altar based just on their conversations and not on physical attraction? But, it's reality TV, and all of this proves to be a bit of a nightmare. It turns out that it is quite easy to put up a persona, especially when you can't be seen. With physical insecurities hidden away, it becomes easier and easier to also hide emotional insecurities, to tuck away those feelings of doubt. I watched a few episodes when it first came out, and I wouldn't recommend it. But in some way it was fascinating to see how men and women could be so focused on finding true love and committed to making the experiment work, that they would fool themselves into believing a person they had just met and never had seen was truly and deeply in love with them, and gloss over clear "red" flags that should signal to everyone involved that the relationship they are pursuing is not healthy. How could it be, started on this premise? No one wants love to be blind, we want love to see all and still be love! We don't want to have to hide our insecurities for someone to love us, we desire to be loved in a way that wipes away our insecurities!

The cultural fascination with a show like "Love is Blind" is not shocking. It reveals something about us that we all know to be true: that we all have a deep desire to be loved for who we are, and that we all have deep insecurities that we see as barriers to that love. Man or woman, we all are wired to be wanted—to be seen, to be cared for, to be noticed, to be valued. And yet, even if we find in human relationships someone who is willing to love us in that way, we often cannot permit ourselves to be truly loved. We just can't believe it's real that anyone would see how we really are—sinful, ugly, broken—and love us anyway. It's why it is only in rare moments when we can truly

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2022/03/love-is-blind-unsettling-relatable/626567/>



take a compliment: from our spouse, or perhaps from a parent or friend. We hear “you are beautiful”, and it feels like a Herculean effort to believe that to be true on a deep, real, level.

Again we shouldn't be shocked by this. God has made us with a desire to love and be loved. It's why Adam was deemed “not good” without Eve. It's why God created in the first place: to share his Triune Love and display it in the world. We also know that sin has broken our world, and has created in us deep insecurities that prevent us from truly experiencing the love of God in full. But there is a way out of our insecurity.

Here is my main point today in the Song of Songs: ***True love is not blind. True love, which is God's love in Christ, sees and answers your deepest insecurities, and opens up your heart to love back.***

## **True Love Answers Our Deepest Insecurities (5-11)**

Last week we saw how to read the Song of Songs. It's a poetic description of an ideal marriage, which is meant to draw us through the picture of human love to consider the realities of divine love. The Song of Songs invites us to consider a picture of Eden past and of the New Jerusalem to come: a place where God walks intimately with his people, and where we are loved truly and fully in our marriage to Jesus Christ, the Son of God. The Song is meant to sweep us up in this way to consider both the realities of human love and how those realities prepare us for the perfect love of God. The man in the Song is a heroic figure meant to show us a type of Jesus Christ, the king and shepherd and lover of his bride, the church. The woman in the song is our teacher, like Lady Wisdom, she is showing us what it is like to be loved truly and deeply, and how to respond to that love.

Last week we saw how the bride described her beloved and longed for him, which challenged us to desire Jesus in a similar way. As we jump into **verse 5** then, we see the bride describing not her beloved, but herself. It's a picture into how we, as fallen humans, are full of insecurity, shame, and objections to love. In **verse 5** the bride being “dark” does not refer to ethnicity but to social class. She is dark because she had to keep the vineyard and work outside. In our culture we often perceive being dark or tan as a positive thing, because for most people it shows that you can afford to spend time in leisure. But it's not the same for everyone: for instance, I know dark skinned men and women who avoid the sun so as not to appear darker than they already are, since tragically this can cause them to be a greater target of racism and racial stereotypes. No one wants to be too dark or too light. But in Ancient Near Eastern culture, this was not the case. To be dark was to show that you were a peasant, of lower cultural status.

What is going on in **verse 5** is a kind of comparison. The bride compares herself with the tents of Kedar: a nomadic people known for their dark, goat fur huts. She is an uncivilized, country woman. The other women are compared to “the curtains of Solomon”, which was a curtain in the temple that was light and pure, with fine embroidery. When the bride says “I am dark, but lovely” she is trying to assert herself. I know I don't *look* lovely, but I want to be. We know this is an insecurity for



her because in **verse 6** she says “don’t look at me!” What is it about you that you might say to others “do not gaze at me because...” Perhaps that is a barrier to you feeling loved and desired. Here, the bride is insecure because of her comparison with others status and appearance.

As it turns out, her insecurity is not her own fault. She speaks of her brothers, calling them a distant “my mother’s sons”, revealing that she is not close to them, she was not protected by them> They made her work outside in the vineyard, which caused her, in her words, to neglect “her own vineyard”. In Biblical language, the vineyard is a picture of fruitfulness and when related to a woman, of her sexuality or body. Because I was forced to work, she is saying, I could not maintain my own image like I desired. Often our own insecurities are not of our own doing. Here, the bride is insecure because of her past.

Besides her appearance, the bride is concerned that she will be unable to find her beloved when she needs him. In **verse 7** he is compared to a shepherd. This may simply be a way of showing he also is familiar with the country, but I think it is also drawing us to think of the great shepherds of the Hebrew ideals: Abel, Abraham, Jacob, David all were shepherds. The reason he may be difficult to find is because shepherds move around from pasture to pasture in order to graze with their sheep. She desires to find her beloved at “noon”, because that is the time when the sheep would rest, lie down, and they could spend time together. It’s also a contrast to night—the time of day she does not want to spend searching for her beloved. To go to him at night would mean that she was “veiled”. This is likely a reference to prostitution—where “ladies of the night” would veil themselves and offer themselves to men at night in dark places. It’s the same description used for Tamar in Genesis 38, and may be a direct allusion to that. The bride is concerned for her reputation that could be at stake. She is insecure because of her worry that her love is gone and lost, unstable.

Consider with me: when I say: “you are beloved by God”, what hesitations come to your mind? What is true about you that seems to cause doubt that God’s love is real? Perhaps it is “I am too sinful”. Maybe “I have wasted my life” or “I have been through too much hurt and pain”. Perhaps it’s “I have nothing to offer” or “my heart is too hardened”. Whatever insecurity you feel, ashamed to be seen, let us see now the response of the king.

### **1. He meets your comparison with his superlatives.**

The bride compared herself to the rich and socially elite city girls. But her beloved listens, he sees her, he is not blind, and he tells her plainly in **verse 8** that she is “most beautiful among women.” None compare to her. Not only this, but in **verse 9** he makes his own comparison. She is a mare among pharaoh's chariots. To gaze at Pharaoh's chariots would be a room full of war stallions—rough and strong and fast. A mare would stick out amongst them—she would be beautiful, elegant. This may also be an allusion to a popular ancient story, where Pharaoh's chariots were distracted by the sigh of a mare in their midst, akin to saying “you drive all men wild!”

What is the beloved saying? It's very simple: his bride is beyond comparison. She is like the single mare who drives all the strong willed stallions to insanity. No one fails to notice her beauty. She is



worried that she doesn't measure up—and his answer? No one measures up to you. We get another picture of this in **2:1-2**. A rose of Sharon is a common flower, a lily found in every valley. But the king responds in verse 2: you are not a common flower among other flowers—you are a flower among thorns, and entirely different species all together.

On a human level, this is what true love does to us. It causes us to zero in. Husbands should feel this way about their wives, that there is none that compares to them, that they are of an entirely different species, superlatively beautiful. This kind of affection is the sign of healthy love. And this is exactly how God in Christ feels towards us. You may feel common, insecure about how you fit in. But God's word says that you are chosen from before time to be his. You were plucked out, predestined out of a thousand others. Not only that, but you are fearfully and wonderfully made. God sees *you*, he is not blind to you. Jesus said his purpose on earth was to seek and save the lost, to find the one coin missing, to leave the 99 to go after the one lost sheep. You are that lost sheep—he died to save you, and if you are in Christ—there is none that compares in his love. Yes, we are loved all by Christ, but his love is so deep and infinite that he doesn't need to compare you. There is no ranking system in the affections of Christ's heart. You truly are one in a million.

## 2. He meets your past with his adornment.

The bride is also ashamed of her past hurt and pain. She feels less than, traumatized by her difficult upbringing, and how she was treated by her brothers and family. Perhaps she feels abandoned, as there is no mention of Father or protector. I'm struck by her language in comparing herself to a vineyard. Again and again in Scripture, Israel is compared to a vineyard, the one who God keeps and beautifies. But there is also sadness in Israel's history. God planted them, but they did not keep themselves. Their vineyard was abandoned. So we read in Isaiah 5:

For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are his pleasant planting; and he looked for justice, but behold, bloodshed; for righteousness, but behold, an outcry!

The bride feels this pain in identification with Israel. Even if it is not her fault, she feels the pain of the sin of her brothers, the outcry and bloodshed, the lack of justice. Because of this sin, she “has not kept her vineyard.” She looks at her life and sees not beauty, but barrenness. Many of us feel similarly. Because of our sin or others' sins done to us, our past is barren. We have been forced into injustice, and we do not have a pleasant planting. In fact, we may feel like we have little to show for our life at all! Instead of a beautiful harvest of grapes and wine, we have shame and guilt.

But here comes the king. The poor bride has no harvest of personal beauty for herself, but he sees things differently. **In verses 10-11**, he pictures her as adorned with fine jewelry, with beautiful and rich jewels. This is not just fantasy—but the onlookers promise that it will be reality. The beauty of the bride will be realized, and the fruit of her beauty will be shown as they promise to create for her beautiful ornaments and jewelry.



Friends, your past may be incredibly barren. But Christ is the master of the vineyard, and the true Israel, the vine which you attach yourself to by faith. Your body may be broken and you may have been defiled, but you are not worthless. He has come to adorn you with his righteousness and his justice. When Jesus came to die a perfect death on the cross, what he did was adorn you with his crown, with his jewels. One day, what is spiritually true of you now will be physically true of you—as you will shine with his righteousness fully in the earth to come. There is no need to harbor insecurity from your past sin—accept the adornment of his love.

### **3. He meets your anxiety with his presence.**

Lastly, the bride worries she will lose her love. This is a common anxiety of our life. When we have something too good to be true, we are always worried we will lose it. We are concerned our kids may be taken from us, our spouses, our family. We can't imagine that sorrow that some people feel.

But the love of Christ is not hard to find. He is not hiding, you just have to know where to look. Although he is a king, you will find him not in an isolated castle in the clouds, but you will find him fulfilling his vocation as shepherd. "Follow in the footsteps of the flock" says **verse 8**, and you will find the shepherd.

Too often we forget that Jesus has promised to be "near to the brokenhearted", that he is "the Good shepherd" who will not lose a single one of his sheep. Would you like to find Jesus? Find his people—there he will be, caring to them, ministering to them. Plant your life in the church, and Jesus will be there. "Pasture your goats" beside the Shepherd's tabernacle.

This is immensely practical. We feel furthest from Christ's love when we are furthest from his love expressed through his people. The church is intended to be the place of welcome, the place where, as 2 Corinthians 1 describes, we receive the comfort of Christ through the comfort that others have received from him. In the church, we should never be afraid of our reputations, that we might be mistaken for a sinner as the bride was concerned she would be mistaken for a prostitute. Why? Because we are all sinners! We are all men and women of the night, who Jesus has shown the way to come to him in the bright noon of day and rest. "I am the way, the truth, and the life" Jesus says. "I am the light of the world".

Are you worried Jesus will leave you? He says: I am with you always, even to the end. He sends his Spirit to guide, to indwell your hearts and the hearts of your brothers and sisters in Christ. Jesus' answer to your insecurity is his presence.

The love of God is not blind. He doesn't look past your insecurities, he meets them head on. But there's more. The love of God, true love, also changes how we respond to his love. He not only answers our insecurities, he frees us to leave them behind.



## True Love Opens Our Hearts to Love Back (12-17)

The bride speaks again in **verses 12-14**, but her tone is very different. No longer does she have to prove herself, but she has begun to see herself rightly. She is beginning to believe that although she is lowly, poor, and with a shady past—her beloved doesn't just tolerate her, he longs for her. Notice the three fragrances: *nard*, *myrrh*, and *henna*. All of these will play a bigger role later in the Song. Right now I just want you to see her point is that she has completely changed her outlook on herself. She is attractive, so much so that she imagines her beloved resting on her chest intimately, as they both give off pleasing scents. She likens their embrace of desire to a blossoming vineyard of Engedi. Before, she was unable to keep her vineyard—now, in the love of her beloved, her vineyard is blossoming! And not only that, it's like the Engedi—the place where King David sheltered from Saul in the wilderness. Their love is anything but insecure—it's a place of kingly refuge from God!

The man speaks again in **verse 15**, confirming this reality. Her eyes are doves, he says. It is said that eyes are the “windows of the soul”. When someone is sad and insecure, it will be shown in their eyes. I can tell when my wife is having a bad day, or when I say something that upsets her. I can even tell in her eyes when I give her a compliment that doesn't stick, that doesn't reach through her insecurities. So here the beloved is acknowledging that the eyes of his bride are like beautiful doves—they are lit up, they are finally receiving his love and responding. Doves were traditionally messengers of love and affection, we think of “turtledoves”. But we should also think of the Holy Spirit, the messenger of God's love, who comes in the form of a dove. It's only by the work of the Holy Spirit that we light up truly to understand and embrace the love of God in Christ.

All of this culminates in the bride repeating the call of her beloved in **verse 16**. She is confident now. It's like the first time you say “I love you” to someone in a romantic way. Will they say it back? But when they do, you are enraptured, like a call and response of love. True love not only answers our insecurities, it demolishes them and frees our souls to enjoy love to the full. This is the connotation of **verse 17**. A “green” couch isn't referring to the color of their furniture, nor is “a house of cedar and rafters of pine” talking about something Joanna Gaines might install in a fixer upper. The image is of a garden, a bed of grass, and a forest of cedar and pine. But it also has the connotation of the temple—the temple of God built by Solomon was made entirely of Lebanon Cedar and pine. Their love is the opposite of insecure—it's as secure as God's enduring presence. It's like Eden, the garden of perfection, and like the temple, the very house of God.

All this goes to show us that it is possible for you to have a love in your life that is always and entirely secure. The gospel is an invitation to a love that will never forsake you, never condemn you, and never compare you to another.

But listen very closely. This love requires something radical. See, when we picture true love we often picture it like the show “Love is Blind”. We want people to look past our flaws, to accept us for who we are. But true love requires you being willing not just to be accepted, but to be changed into someone more and more lovely. Ultimately, this is why God has designed marriage. In



marriage, man and woman become one flesh in a way that makes them more lovely than they were alone. They compliment each other, work together for holiness and to breed life in the world.

And yet, no marriage is perfectly lovely. Because here is the thing about perfection: in order to reach it, both parties in this marriage don't need to be perfect. But at least one does. Perfect love alone, the Scripture says, casts out fear. Perfect love is the only thing strong enough to banish insecurities forever. I can tell my wife "I love you" again and again, and she knows it to be true. But until I am perfect, my brokenness will always shed doubt on my love for her. In order for all her fear of being unlovely, unworthy, and unaccepted to be gone, she needs to be captured by a perfect love. By God's grace, we have a perfect love—the love of Jesus Christ.

Love is not about acceptance, it's about change. It's about growth towards perfection—what the church has historically called "the Beatific vision". When we truly see God, "when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away." When we truly experience the love of God in Christ without insecurity, nothing will stand in the way of our happiness and bliss. To be loved by God is to be perfect, to be wed to Christ is to be more lovely than we ever imagined we could be on our own.

None of this can happen if we believe the solution to our insecurities is to think of ourselves more highly, to raise our self esteem. None of this can happen if we bury our insecurities. It can only happen if we open ourselves up to the love of Christ by faith. Christ's love is not concerned with how you see yourself, but with how he sees you. In other words, he is not standing behind you in the mirror, saying: "I see all your flaws, and I love you anyway." In Christ, the Triune God is standing behind you in the mirror saying: "what flaws?" His love is so powerful and so perfect that it creates a new reality: one where you can be entirely perfect with him.

***True love is not blind. True love, which is God's love in Christ, sees and answers your deepest insecurities, and opens up your heart to love back.*** That is what is coming for you if you are in Christ. A garden-temple, a new Eden and a New Jerusalem. And even today, Jesus is crying out to you, calling you. He says: "you are beautiful. Come away with me. I love you." And get this: he lives to hear you say "I love you" back. Will you respond, or will you allow your insecurities and fears to have the day?

