

The language of the lovers in The Song of Songs

By Barry McWilliams

Without verbal lovemaking, there would be no beauty and little feeling in love. It would be cold and impersonal. Too often today the media portray the communication between lovers as coarse or ugly. A book in the Bible, The Song of Songs, gives us a much better picture of "love talk" that is beautiful, which builds up our spouses and our marriages and is much more honoring to God.

In preparing this study, I examined the vocabulary of the Song of Songs of Solomon, God's "marriage manual". The following observations draw on this study, and then expand with more principles in regard to our "Love Talk": the manner in which married couples communicate their love for each other.

In this "Song" there is a definite beauty of speech that stands out even when expressing the most intimate of thoughts. There is much explicit and intimate talk in the Song, in fact, there is enough to make anyone blush. There are plenty of definite references to the sexual organs of the body - the breasts, etc - and many more "suggestions".

There is a considerable "poetic" use of words - creating with verbal imagery lovely expressions of feelings and emotions that are hard to put into words. There is the richness and beauty of comparison as they describe one another in terms of animals or plants, and their pet names for each other. Expressions abound with double meaning - a reference to "*Blow on my garden that its fragrance may spread abroad. Let my lover come into his garden and taste its choice fruits*" expresses her desire for his intimate sexual contact with her genitals in a way that is beautiful without vulgarity, or clinical coldness, especially when read in the larger context of the garden and plant imagery throughout the book.

There are a number of observations to be drawn from this use of imagery between married lovers:

We have to recognize that it is a secret love language that this couple has created to express their feelings for each other.

It is for the privacy of the bed-chamber. These words with their explicit meanings are for the ears of the beloved alone - they are not used in conversations with others, or, crudely to titillate the general public.

Much of their love language is drawn from the pleasant things of their backgrounds. How appropriate the botanical illusions of gardens and fruit from and to a girl who has grown up working in the vineyards. Drawn from daily life, these have been infused with sincere and honest emotional expressions of love.

The lovers in the Song communicate much more than just passion in their secret language.

There almost seems to be a third level of meaning behind the words. For behind the literal and poetic meaning are statements concerning character and personality. For example, in the description of the bride in Chapter 4 are not only references to her physical beauty, but also declarations as to her character as well. Perhaps we can learn from this to create a love language that speaks to more than the physical, and carries with it much more.

The lovers are both profuse and frank in their love talk.

They do not make love in silence, nor do they hesitate to express desire and delight in explicit ways. There is no inhibition in either man or wife. Each tells the other what is desired or what pleases.

There is much romantic talk! The smooth words of the lover who comes courting continue on into their marriage as he woos and arouses his wife again and again with his words. The bride does not hold back on responding to his love talk with her own "sensual" speech. In fact, nearly half of the 117 verses in the Song are hers. Love is constantly expressed in a variety of ways and settings .

How "sensual" is both their lovemaking and their love talk.

There are repeated references to fragrance and taste and sight and touch. Kisses are sweeter than wine, lovemaking is fragrant with myrrh, and the lovers describe each other intimately. There is much ornamentation and beauty in their clothing and the settings of their love. There is an elegance and a sense of preciousness that speaks loudly of how special their love is.

The lovers stir one another's imaginations with their talk. They create fantasies with their words and build anticipation of delights to come. For him to speak of "*climbing the palm tree and taking hold of its fruit*" or her to speak of him "*browsing among the lilies*" certainly heightens the passion of the other.

How aware they are of each other, and also how constant and positive they are in expressing their appreciation of one another.

He is sensitive to her insecurity and repeated need of encouragement and moves to meet that need with his words. She responds to him similarly, letting him know how pleased she is in him and by his loving. We can infer from this that they were active listeners - hearing not only the words, but also the feelings and needs behind them.

This kind of openness does not come readily. Lovers must prepare the way to the wonders of sexual communion through open communication and much talk. Marriage books unanimously state the greatest need for married people today is to talk to each other.

There is richness and variety of mood and atmosphere, of time and place. But often the words of the lovers are what makes the moment so romantic, so seductive, so sensual, so special as they express their love for one another. Romantic gestures, and places will never compensate for the absence of verbalized expressions of love.

Open communication lines are an important pre-requisite for the "one flesh" experience. While love talk must be private (as all deeply personal communication must be based upon the trust that confidences will not be betrayed), Love talk should not be confined to the bedroom, though it often leads the way into it.

We can draw the following principles from this love song:

1. There should be frequent and varied expression of love between lovers. Love talk ought to be a constant on-going process. That requires deliberate effort by both partners.
2. These expressions consist of positive expressions of appreciation and affirming the value of one's spouse as they are. One key message of the Song is the importance of building up one another through the communicating of that which we respect, admire, and cherish in the personality and character of another person to them. It is not negative, critical, or complaining in tone.
3. Love talk is honest and sincere in fully sharing oneself and in appreciating our spouses.
4. Love talk is sensitive to the needs and concerns of one's lover, and thus actively listening. Love talk is responsive. It is a dialog of heart and mind.
5. Love talk seeks to be beautiful and pure. It uses lovely and highly expressive language that is both sensual and emotional, but never crude.
6. Love talk is sensual, both in that it includes both verbal and non-verbal communication, and in that it appeals to all the senses. Kisses, hugs, caresses, eye contact, facial expressions, gestures and actions are just as important as the words being used. In fact, when verbal and non-verbal communication are not in agreement, we usually trust the non-verbals.
7. Love talk is appropriate to its circumstances. At times, love talk is romantic, at times intimate, sometimes playful, sometimes painful, some times quite serious - at all times it involves building up our spouse and the marriage relationship. It is need orientated, reflecting God's wisdom in making of two different people a oneness where the strengths and weakness of the two balance each other.
8. While very personal desires are often shared, yet such "fantasies" ought to be grounded in reality (loving our spouses and not a dream lover) and honoring to God (not lust-orientated, but love orientated).
9. Love talk is open communication on a variety of levels between two people committed to one another. It is true intimacy, where we give over the keys to our inner selves and become transparent to our mates.

May we learn from the Song of Songs how to bring singing into our marriages through the delights of love talk.

ADJECTIVES & ADVERBS.

Beautiful (13)
lovely (5)
beloved (4)
love
darling
bride
loves
pleasing (3)
awaken
desires
kiss(es)
delightful(2)
browses
arouse
delight
awake
delights
gaze
graze
embraces
arise
hear
listen
taste
desire
spoke
held
sweet
gazing (1)
despise
follow
leaning
descend
lover's
lovers
adore
enclose
crowns
charming
perfect
peering
purest
praise(d)
contentment
rejoiced
radiant
ruddy
delights
flawless
outstanding
bright
lovingly
handsome

SPICES

spice(s) (7)
henna (2)

nard
cinnamon(1)
calamus
saffron
aloes

THEIR BODIES

breasts (8)
eyes (7)
head (5)
heart
hair
arm
mouth (4)
lips
neck (3)
teeth
cheeks (2)
legs
hands
face
temples
arms (1)
appearance
hand
navel
nose
finger
body
tongue
tresses
waist

ANIMALS

flock (5)
gazelle
doves (4)
sheep
fawns (3)
stag
dove
goats
foxes (2)
does
flocks (1)
raven
lions
mare
leopards

SMELL

fragrance(8)
myrrh (4)
perfume
incense (3)
blended (1)
perfumed
perfumes

FRUITS

fruit (6)
pomegranates (3)
apples (2)
apple
pomegranate
mandrakes
fig
wheat

FLOWERS

garden (6)
lilies
tree (5)
vineyards
vineyard
bloom (3)
vines
cedars (2)
field
blossoms
palm
budded
fruits
lily
fountain
gardens
trees
clusters
cluster (1)
firs
blossoming
dew
growth
rose
rains
flowers
streams
orchards
plants
pools
verdant
waters

FOOD

wine (8)
miik (3)
sweetness(2)
honeycomb
honey
banquet (1)
eat
nectar
Goblet
raisins

JEWELRY & ORNAMENT

silver (4)
royal (2)
jewels

earrings (2)
crown
shekels
chariots
ivory
carriage
sword
elegance (1) decorated
chrysolite
cloak
banner(s)
necklace
polished
panels
marble
purple
ribbon
jewel
crowned
robe
scarlet
sandaled
sapphires
sachet
garments
tapestry
noblest
upholstered
inlaid
veiled

PLACES

Lebanon (7)
beds (2)
mountains
desert
tents
hills
mountain
dance (1)
dens
chambers
Hesbon
Gibeah
Damascus
hill
Carmel
bath
earth
crest
Kedar
Mahanaim
countryside
forest
rains
valley(s)