

ESF, Lord's day service message
4/3/2016

The Blessed Life Through Intimacy with God
Song of Songs 2:8-15

- ⁸ Listen! My lover!
Look! Here he comes,
leaping across the mountains,
bounding over the hills.*
- ⁹ My lover is like a gazelle or a young stag.
Look! There he stands behind our wall,
gazing through the windows,
peering through the lattice.*
- ¹⁰ My lover spoke and said to me,
"Arise, my darling,
my beautiful one, and come with me.*
- ¹¹ See! The winter is past;
the rains are over and gone.*
- ¹² Flowers appear on the earth;
the season of singing has come,
the cooing of doves
is heard in our land.*
- ¹³ The fig tree forms its early fruit;
the blossoming vines spread their fragrance.
Arise, come, my darling;
my beautiful one, come with me."*
- ¹⁴ My dove in the clefts of the rock,
in the hiding places on the mountainside,
show me your face,
let me hear your voice;
for your voice is sweet,
and your face is lovely.*
- ¹⁵ Catch for us the foxes,
the little foxes*

*that ruin the vineyards,
our vineyards that are in bloom.*

The Song of Songs is a love song which comes from the intimate love relationship between a man and a woman, or between a bridegroom and a bride.

But this love song means more than man's love of a woman. It refers to the intimate love relationship between God and His people, and between Christ and His followers (Hosea 2:19-20; Ephesians 5:25-32; Revelation 19:6-7; Revelation 21:1-4 etc.). With this love song, God invites us to a blessed life through an intimate love relationship with Him.

God's love turns a life of winter into a life of spring

There are times when something dark and painful comes into our lives. This song compares such a life with a cold winter. But, God's love in Christ brings us a new and joyful life like flowers in spring: *See! The winter is past; the rains are over and gone. Flowers appear on the earth; the season of singing has come, (vs 11-12)*

To turn our lives of winter into lives of spring the Lord sacrificed Himself. Verse 8 says that the lover, the Lord "*comes, leaping across the mountains, bounding over the hills.*" Here mountains and hills signify the obstacles which man must overcome to receive God's love, but which are impossible for man to overcome. So God sent His Son Jesus to overcome the obstacles and bring His love to man. To overcome the obstacles, Jesus suffered and sacrificed His life on the cross: *God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:8).*

Through Christ's sacrifice, God comes to us and loves us intimately. God's love for you gives you comfort and joy in all circumstances.

"A Raisin In the Sun" is a play about a black family on Chicago's south side. The father died and left several thousand dollars from an insurance policy. The mother was going to use the money to fulfill a longtime dream of buying a small bungalow for the family to live in. It would not be a nice big house, but they would be able to move out of their small, ragged apartment, and call it their own. The son also had a dream. He had never had a decent job, so he convinces the mother to give him the money as an investment in a business deal. The mother wanted happiness for her son more than anything. And so she gave him the money, and the so-called "friend" of the son promptly skipped town with the money. The young man was left alone to face his mother and sister. His shoulders were slumped in defeat, his head bowed low as he told them the money was gone. The sister screamed at him. She called him names. When she finished her contempt and scorn the mother spoke, "I thought I taught you to love him." The daughter shouted back, "Love him? There is nothing left to love." The mother says, "There is always something left to love. And if you haven't learned that, you have learned nothing. Child, when do you think is the time to love somebody the most? It's when he's at his lowest and can't believe in himself because the world has whipped him so."

A life of spring comes not through conditions but through God's sacrificial and unconditional love. Through the sacrificial love of Christ, God turns our lives of winter into lives of spring.

God invites us to an intimate relationship with Him

1. Arise, come and show me your face

As a loving bridegroom, the Lord wants to have an intimate love relationship with us as His bride. The Lord has sacrificed everything to love us as His bride. However, He does not force us to love Him. He gently asks us to come to Him: *show me your face, let me hear your voice* (verse 14).

He gently encourages us to open our hearts to Him. In Revelation

3:20, the Lord says, *Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.*

Also when we turn our hearts away from him and pursue the love of others, He patiently waits for us to come back to Him (Romans 2:4; 1 Peter 3:20). He is always ready to forgive us and accept us as His beloved ones (Luke 15:11-31).

Some people think that they will come to God when they become better persons. But with this love song, God wants us to come to Him just as we are right now. The word in verse 10 expresses the Lord's gentle and unconditional loving heart for us: *My lover spoke and said to me, "Arise, my darling, my beautiful one, and come with me."* He does not say, "My darling, I have sacrificed everything to love you. So you must try to be a better person to come to me." He does not say, "You must be a good person to receive my precious love." He says, "Through my sacrifice, I have cleansed you. You don't need to try to be a better person to come and receive my love. Just come to me now as you are."

So, even if we feel and think that we are not worthy to receive God's love, we should go to Him to receive His love. Even if we have lived as prodigal sons, we can and should come to receive His intimate love.

2. Catch the little foxes

Where there is love, there is jealousy. While we have an intimate love relationship with the Lord, there is one who is jealous of us. In this love song the author Solomon describes him as little foxes. The little foxes are the destructive ways of Satan who is jealous of God's love for us. Satan uses little things to destroy our love relationship with God.

God encourages us to catch the little foxes. How can we catch them?

a). Guard your heart against small sins

When Satan tried to destroy Samson's intimate relationship with God, Satan did not use a great temptation. Satan used little temptations over and over again through a seductive woman. The little seductions became stronger and stronger. And they eventually destroyed Samson's intimate love with the Lord. He lost the power coming from the Lord's Spirit (Judges chapter 16).

Humbly recognize that you are always vulnerable to sin. Your prayer always include this prayer "Lord lead us not into temptation." Confess your sin before God moment by moment. And God will protect you from Satan's seduction and His love will remain in you intimately. John wrote in 1 John 1:8-9, *If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.*

b). Take trials as opportunities to grow

Little foxes are discouraging spirits through trials. Through trials Satan provokes us to think that God does not love us. Satan says, "If God loves you why could such a bad thing happen to you? Your trial is evidence that God does not love you." But that is a lie. The truth is that God loves us even in trials. God allows trials for our benefit. God uses trials to help us grow and become stronger (1 Peter 1:6-7).

The Great Barrier Reef stretches some 1,800 miles from New Guinea to Australia. Tour guides regularly take visitors to view the reef.

On one tour, the guide was asked an interesting question. "I notice that the lagoon side of the reef looks pale and lifeless, while the

ocean side is vibrant and colorful," a traveler observed. "Why is this?"

The guide gave an interesting answer: "The coral around the lagoon side is in still water, with no challenge for its survival. It dies early. The coral on the ocean side is constantly being tested by wind, waves, storms -- surges of power. It has to fight for survival every day of its life. As it is challenged and tested it changes and adapts. It grows healthy. It grows strong. And it reproduces."

Then he added this telling note: "That's the way it is with every living organism."

That's how it is with God's children. With challenges and tests through trials, God makes us alive and strong! Like coral pounded by the sea, we grow. Physical demands can cause us to grow stronger. Mental and emotional stress can produce tough-mindedness and resiliency. Spiritual testing can produce strength of character and faithfulness. So when you have trials just confess your faith, "God loves me in this trial. By God's love I can become stronger"

c). Overcome evil with good

Satan provokes us to get angry and to get bitter by little offenses others may commit against us. When the anger and bitterness remain in our hearts, they kill not only the intimacy with those who have offended us, but also our spirit of loving the Lord. They are like little foxes that destroy the vineyard. How can we forgive those who offend and hurt us? By remembering how many times we have offended the Lord and how many times the Lord has forgiven us.

There is a story of an English Sergeant stationed in Egypt. In his platoon, there was a young Private who really loved Jesus.

The Private was often hassled over his commitment to Jesus as his Lord and Savior.

The Sergeant was not a believer and gave the young Private a hard time. The two men had been on duty on a cold rainy night. The conditions were terrible. The Company came in from duty, they were very tired, cold, and damp. Before the Private went to bed, he quietly knelt down to pray.

The Sergeant was on the top bunk. The Sergeant purposely placed his damp, muddy boots, on either side of the praying soldier's head.

The Private never looked up, he kept praying, with the wet, muddy boots all over his face.

The next morning when the Sergeant heard the trumpet's call, he jumped out of bed. There next to the Sergeant's bunk was his boots, beautifully shining. The Private had polished the Sergeant's muddy boots and quietly placed them there.

Nobody knew but just the Sergeant and the Private. The Private never claimed his rights, or spoke poorly of his leader. He just served him.

The Sergeant's heart was broken. Later the Sergeant asked the Private, "will you tell me about your Master? I want Him in my heart."

Forgiving and a gentle attitude can always catch provoking, destructive foxes of the Devil. Such an attitude brings us to an intimate love relationship with the Lord and with all people. Then we can turn our lives from winter to a life of spring. *Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good* (Romans 12:21).