
FROM THE MINISTRY OF



THRUthe**BIBLE**

BELOVED

LOVE LESSONS FROM THE SONG OF SOLOMON

A photograph of a woman with long, wavy blonde hair, wearing a wide-brimmed tan hat and a dark, long-sleeved dress with a vibrant floral pattern. She is walking away from the camera down a dirt path in a vineyard. The vines on either side are covered in autumn-colored leaves. She is holding a wicker basket in her left hand and has her right hand raised to her forehead, shielding her eyes from the sun. The background shows a hazy landscape under a bright sky.

DR. J. VERNON MCGEE

BELOVED

LOVE LESSONS FROM THE SONG OF SOLOMON

The Song of Solomon is one of the most beautiful love stories in the Bible—yet not many people read it. In history, young preachers have been counseled not to preach out of it until they become old men. The Jews called it the Holy of Holies of Scripture. As Dr. McGee said, “Surely any fragile flower requires delicate handling.”

What's good to remember when you study this controversial book is that Solomon wrote this love story about married love as a parable of God's love for Israel, and now we see it also as Jesus' love for the church and His love for us, individually.

Solomon was the Stephen Foster, the Irving Berlin, and the Andrew Lloyd-Weber of his day. He wrote beautiful songs.

In 1 Kings 4:32 we're told, “[Solomon] *spoke three thousand proverbs and his songs were one thousand and five.*” We have only a few hundred of the proverbs Solomon wrote and only one

of the 1,005 songs. But don't be distressed by this loss, for we have "the Song of Songs," which is the Hebrew way of saying, "This is the best one he wrote."

Through the centuries, the Song of Solomon has often disturbed believers because of its elaborate, vivid, and passionate language of the ancient East. It's painted with bold strokes in bright colors. It's actually a delightful, delirious, and divine perfume when we enter into it, but our Western minds are offended by its uncensored expressions. There's also a danger of reading into the Song a sense of the vulgar and voluptuous, the sexual and the sensuous.

Critics have used the Song of Solomon to find fault with the Word of God. But Origen and Jerome tell us that the young Israelite was not permitted to read the Song of Solomon until he was 30 years old. (Not a bad idea, I think.)

Although I have preached on the Song of Solomon many times, I must confess to you that it means a great deal more to me today than it did 20 years ago. If you compare this poem to other poems and songs that came out of the Middle East during the same period, you will find that this one is extremely mild and restrained. It's neither as elaborate as the others, nor as vivid as it first appears to our Western minds.

When you approach the Song of Solomon, you are coming to the holy of holies. As was true of the Holy of Holies in the temple—that not everyone was permitted inside its sacred enclosure—so it is with the Song of Solomon. You are dwelling in the secret place of the Most High. And the skeptic, the carnal Christian, the man of the world is apt to say, "What good purpose does this book serve? Does it have any practical value?" The pragmatist says today of the Song, "How do you apply a book like this to life?"

May I say to you this book just happens to be more practical than the pragmatist thinks.

#1 SONG OF SOLOMON
PICTURES MARRIED LOVE

It sets forth, first of all, the glory of wedded love. It tells us of one of the most important phases of our lives, the sacredness of marriage. It teaches us marriage is a divine institution. The Song of Songs teaches what real love is. It reveals the heart of a satisfied husband and devoted wife.

As you know, our generation boasts of its sophistication and knows a great deal about sex, but it knows practically nothing about real love. The old anecdote is told about the father who took his son aside and said, "Son, I want to talk to you about the birds and the bees." And the son responded, "Sure, Dad, what is it you want to know?"

Witness the frequency of divorces. Shallow folk can't live together very long. Why? They know all about sex, but know little about real love. In modern novels and plays, the heroes are neurotic, the heroines are erotic, and the plots are tommyrot-ic. Media takes people through the moral sewers of life. It's not a very enticing or engaging trip, my beloved.

So in stark contrast, this Song of Solomon sets before us the beauty and the glory of marriage. It is a book that ought to be a primer today for young couples who are entering into the state of matrimony.

#2 SONG OF SOLOMON
MAKES KNOWN GOD'S LOVE FOR ISRAEL

This little book sets before us the love of God for Israel. This is where the Old Testament saints, especially the rabbis, found so much rich meaning. This theme was not new to them—the prophets had presented this in many, many Scripture portions. Hosea especially speaks about Jehovah as the bridegroom and the nation Israel as His bride.

**GOD USES A LITTLE BOOK
LIKE THIS TO AROUSE US TO
RESPOND TO HIS LOVE AND**

to love Him in return.

- DR. J. VERNON MCGEE



#3 SONG OF SOLOMON REVEALS CHRIST'S LOVE FOR THE CHURCH

Also, the church today has found rich meaning in this little book. It reveals the love of Christ for the church. God, knowing your difficulty and my difficulty, uses human affection to convey spiritual truth to our dull minds, our discontented hearts, our distorted affections, and our diseased wills. In this beautiful love song, He portrays something of His great love for us. That is how practical this book is.

God's so great love is brought down to a human plane where you and I can grasp it and then be elevated and lifted to the very heights. God uses a little book like this to arouse us to respond to His love and to love Him in return.

#4 SONG OF SOLOMON ILLUSTRATES CHRIST'S LOVE FOR YOU

There's a fourth and last wonderful meaning in this book. Many have made it very personal. They have found in this book the love of Christ for themselves, for the individual. Some of the greatest saints the church has ever produced have gone to this little book for their personal blessing. The most practical evangelist the world has ever seen, Dwight L. Moody, loved the Song of Solomon and said it was his favorite book.

My friend, why don't you read it in quietness and let the Spirit of God speak to your heart beyond and above the human affection that is set before us here? The apostle John put it succinctly, "*We love Him because He first loved us*" (1 John 4:19). What a wonderful thing! And may I say to you, that's what Christianity is. *We love Him because He first loved us*. If you let it, this little book will break an alabaster box of ointment that will sweeten your life and give a fragrance to your marriage and your testimony. It's a lovely thing!

A photograph of a beach at sunset. The ocean waves are washing onto the sand, creating a white foam. The sky is a mix of orange, yellow, and blue. In the top right corner, the lower legs and feet of a person are visible, standing on the wet sand. Several footprints are visible in the sand leading away from the water.

LET'S INVITE
THE SPIRIT OF GOD
TO ENABLE US
FIGURATIVELY TO
REMOVE THE SHOES
FROM OUR FEET,
AS WE STAND
ON HOLY GROUND.

- DR. J. VERNON MCGEE

THE SETTING

The Old Testament Hebrews often used antiphonal singing in their worship of God. Alternating choirs took turns singing lines and phrases back and forth to each other. The Song of Solomon was written to be read like this. The bride and the daughters of Jerusalem sang a question and the other answered back. Then the bride and the bridegroom took turns singing to each other.

Picture two scenes in this book: One in the poor, northern hill country of Ephraim and the other in the palace city of Jerusalem. The action shifts back and forth between scenes. The story looks back upon events and experiences that have already transpired, as Solomon's memory skips back and forth—not in the language of logic, but the language of love. Let's invite the Spirit of God to enable us figuratively to remove the shoes from our feet, as we stand on holy ground.

The setting that opens us to the key to the book is Song of Solomon 8:11:

Solomon had a vineyard at Baal Hamon; he leased the vineyard to keepers; everyone was to bring for its fruit a thousand silver coins.

This sets the stage for the love story. It concerned a poor farm family who rented a vineyard from Solomon. They were responsible for taking care of it, receiving a small income for their labor. They were an Ephrathite family—Shulamites. Some may have called them hillbillies. A father wasn't mentioned at all, just a mother, two daughters, and two or more sons.

We could call the oldest daughter Cinderella. Her brothers made her work the vineyards and when she got through there, she herded the sheep. She said of this,

“Do not look upon me, because I am dark, because the sun has tanned me. My mother’s sons were angry with me; they made me the keeper of the vineyards, but my own vineyard I have not kept.” –Song of Solomon 1:5, 6

She tells us that she's sunburned, which meant that she worked outside (a disgrace in that day). Ladies much preferred light, soft skin that came from staying inside. This girl says, “My brothers make me take care of the vineyard, and I've not been able to take care of my own vineyard.” In other words, “I haven't been able to preserve my own beauty because I've had to keep this vineyard of Solomon's.” We can be sure, however, she had a natural loveliness.

The family lived on or near the caravan route that led from Jerusalem to Damascus. As she watched the caravans go by, she would see these ladies of the court—well-dressed and adorned with their jewels and their ointments—and think to herself,

Who is this coming out of the wilderness like pillars of smoke, perfumed with myrrh and frankincense, with all the merchant's fragrant powders? –Song of Solomon 3:6

This little girl, watching from the sidelines as she worked in the hot sun, was painfully conscious of her own appearance. As she looked at these beautiful ladies with their jewels and their silks, this girl dreamed.

Then one day while she was tending her sheep, a handsome shepherd appeared, and he fell in love with her. His words make that clear.

Like a lily among thorns, so is my love among the daughters.

–Song of Solomon 2:2

In other words, “I’ve been looking all my life for *you*. I’ve never seen anyone like you. To me you are a lily among thorns.” He was definitely in love with her. Later he says,

Behold, you are fair, my love! Behold, you are fair! You are all fair, my love, and there is no spot in you. –Song of Solomon 4:1; 7:4

You might say he’s repeating himself. So what? “To me you are fair; you are perfect.” Can you ever improve upon that? If you are a wife, you may remember when your husband first said that to you. (Maybe you should remind him of that!)

We are collectively
our Lord's bride-to-be,
& He says the church
is without spot or wrinkle.

A close-up photograph of a bride's hand holding a large, vibrant bouquet of flowers. The bouquet is composed of various types of roses in shades of pink, yellow, and red, interspersed with green foliage. The bride is wearing a white, flowing wedding dress. In the background, a wooden cross is visible, and the scene is set against a backdrop of a lush green landscape under a bright sky.

— DR. J. VERNON MCGEE

WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

When you and I look at ourselves and at others in the church we often see only our faults. But do you know when our Lord looks at us today He sees us as altogether lovely. He sees His church, purchased with His own blood. He sees us, the people He loves, draped in His robe of righteousness.

Let me draw your attention to something wonderful written by the apostle Paul:

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.

–Ephesians 5:25-27

You and I have no notion how much God loves His church. Like husbands need to be careful about criticizing their wives, we also need to be careful of criticizing the church. We are collectively our Lord's bride-to-be, and He says the church is without spot or wrinkle.

Immediately we object to that thought, "He must not know me, then, and He certainly must not know you." But He *does* know us! My friend, He doesn't see you as you are. When you came to Him and trusted Him as Savior, He not only forgave you for your sins, but He also draped over you His spotless robe of righteousness. He invites you to stand in His presence!

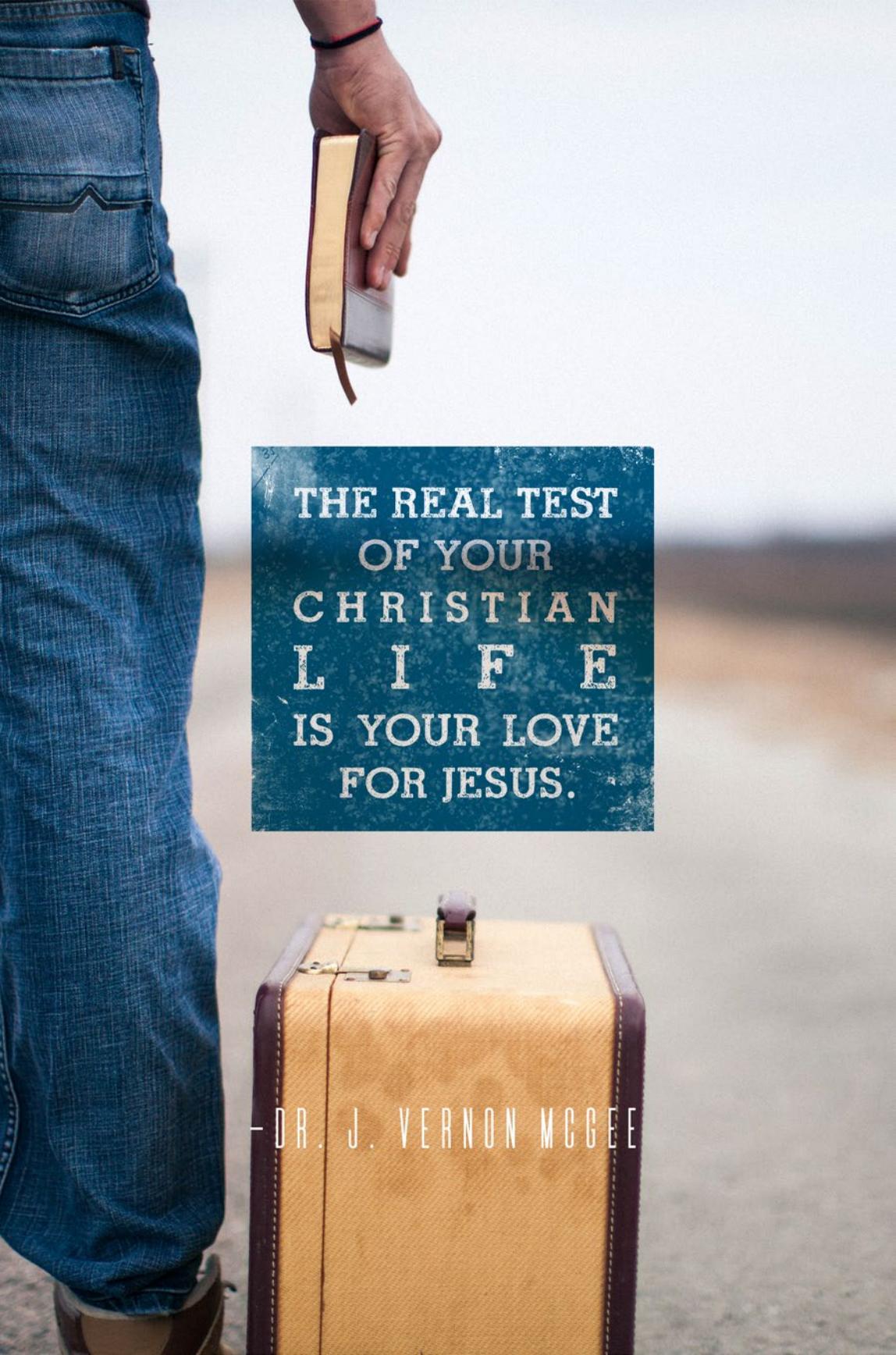
Let me introduce you to a lesson we can learn from the Song of Solomon about God's love for His bride. He says, "*You have ravished my heart How fair is your love ...*" (4:9, 10).

This little book is a beautiful metaphor of God's love. One of the pictures is of Jesus' love for His church. He is the bridegroom here, speaking of the church and of each believer, including you and to me. Because He cleanses us by His blood, we have the forgiveness of sins. "*That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle ...*" He now can look at the church and say, "*Thou art all fair, my love. There is no spot in thee.*" Why? Because He has cleansed us, because He loves us.

Paul found out how much God loves us, and it broke his heart. Before Paul was Jesus' apostle, he hated Jesus and persecuted the early church. Paul called himself the chiefest of sinners. In my imagination, I see him standing with the chief priests at the cross on the day Jesus died, ridiculing Him saying, "*If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross*" (Matthew 27:40).

But then came the day on the road to Damascus when Paul met Jesus in a supernatural way. Paul discovered then how much Jesus Christ loved *him*. Listen to him as he relived again the Crucifixion: "[He] *loved me and gave Himself for me*" (Galatians 2:20). Can you ask Him to do anything more for you to show His love?

Paul said, "He loved me." John says, "*We love Him because He first loved us*" (1 John 4:19). Peter said, "*Whom having not seen you love*" (1 Peter 1:8).

A person wearing blue denim jeans is shown from the waist down. They are holding a brown leather-bound Bible in their right hand. To their right, a yellow and brown suitcase sits on the ground. The background is a bright, overcast sky.

THE REAL TEST
OF YOUR
CHRISTIAN
L I F E
IS YOUR LOVE
FOR JESUS.

— DR. J. VERNON MCCREE

God pity the man who is married to a cold and indifferent wife. But what about Jesus, our Savior, who pours out His love and affection on His beloved, but is received by only a bunch of cold and indifferent saints, unresponsive to His love?

My friend, let's learn a lesson from the beloved bridegroom. Let's speak of our love. Tell Jesus how much you love Him. Stir up each other's affections for Christ, by telling each other of God's love.

He isn't concerned how busy you are in the church, how many committees you're on, or whether you are a member of the board. He doesn't care today how active you may be in Christian service. He doesn't even care whether you are a preacher. But He would love to know whether you love Him or not.

The real test of your Christian life is not faith—that's the way you got saved. Nor is it your service, your sacrifice, nor your gifts. The real test of your Christian life is your love for Jesus.

Do you love Him? Why don't you tell Him so right now.

HE IS COMING AGAIN

Picking up the thread of Solomon's lovely story, we take another look at this very unusual shepherd. He didn't seem to have any sheep, and one day the girl asked him,

Tell me, O you whom I love, where you feed your flock, where you make it rest at noon. –Song of Solomon 1:7a

In essence his answer to her was, “You don't need to ask any questions; just trust me.”

Then he came to her one day and said, “I'm going away for a while, but I will come back. And when I do, I will make you my bride.” And he left. Days went by. Then weeks, even months. Her family began to ridicule her: “Where's that shepherd you've been talking about? What happened to him? Isn't he coming back for you?” The neighbors began to say unkind things.

Around two thousand years ago, our Lord returned to His throne in heaven. But before He left He said, “Don't let your heart be troubled. I'm going to prepare a place for you in My Father's house. Since I am going to prepare a place for you, I will come back and receive you to Myself—that where I am, there you may be also” (see John 14:1-3).

And, friend, we're living in the time period of which Peter wrote,

Knowing this first: that scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, and saying, "Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation." –2 Peter 3:3, 4

Maybe you've had a similar experience when someone asked you, "Where is this Jesus you're talking about?" Or "Do you mean to tell me that you're one of those fanatics who believe He's going to come back to this earth again?" But our Lord said, "I am coming back."

Well, Solomon had made that promise to this trusting country girl, and she believed him. She loved him. She actually dreamed of him:

By night on my bed I sought the one I love; I sought him, but I did not find him. –Song of Solomon 3:1

One night she lay restless on the couch when she smelled a fragrance.

I arose to open for my beloved, and my hands dripped with myrrh, my fingers with liquid myrrh, on the handles of the lock.
–Song of Solomon 5:5

The custom in that day was when a man who was engaged to a girl wanted her to know how much he really loved her, he would slip over at night to her home. Since the handle of the door was on the inside where there was an opening, he would reach through to the inside and put myrrh on the handles of the door. When she would open the door, she would get myrrh on her hands, and the fragrance would fill the home.

So this particular night when she smelled the fragrance of myrrh, she knew her beloved had been there, and she knew he would come for her someday.

**THE ESSENCE OF THE
CHRISTIAN LIFE IS TO
LIVE IN THE PRESENCE
OF JESUS CHRIST.**



- DR. J. VERNON MCCREE

Our Lord told us, “*Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age*” (Matthew 28:20). When Paul was arrested, he was put into the Mamertine prison—that dark, dank dungeon in Rome. And if you would have gone there, as many believers did, to sympathize with him and say, “Poor Paul, it’s awful to be in this stench and darkness,” I have a notion he would have said, “No, you’re wrong. Last night this dungeon was filled with a sweet-smelling fragrance.” You would sniff and say, “That’s not what I smell!” Paul would explain, “The Lord stood by me. He was here, and His fragrance filled the place.”

My friend, today the essence of the Christian life is to live in the presence of Jesus Christ. It’s to have the fragrance of His person in our lives—in the workplace, the marketplace, and especially in our homes. Again, let me repeat it: The real test of your Christian life is not faith—that’s the way you got saved. And the real test today is not your service, your sacrifice, or your gifts. The real test is *love*. Do you love Him? Paul said,

Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal And though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love. –1 Corinthians 13:1, 3, 13

In this moment, is Jesus Christ real to you? He asks the question, “Do you love Me?” He said to the church in Ephesus, “*Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love*” (Revelation 2:4). Would He say that to your church or to mine? Have we left our first love? Is there the fragrance of Christ in your life today?

One day the bride-to-be was busy in the vineyard when down the road there came a cry: “The king is coming! He’s coming!”

Who is this coming out of the wilderness like pillars of smoke, perfumed with myrrh and frankincense, with all the merchant’s fragrant powders? Behold, it is Solomon’s couch, with sixty valiant

men around it, of the valiant of Israel. They all hold swords, being expert in war. Every man has his sword on his thigh because of fear in the night. Of the wood of Lebanon Solomon the King made himself a palanquin. –Song of Solomon 3:6-9

And here came the king in a fancy couch borne on the shoulders of his servants! Everybody was excited and rushed to the roadside. Somebody said to her, “Aren’t you coming?”

“No, I’m not interested.”

“You mean you’re not interested in King Solomon passing by?”

“No.” She was preoccupied with her work and thoughts of the one she loved. And while she was still busy at the vineyard, there came up to her a servant who said, “King Solomon wants to see you.”

“Me? He doesn’t know me.”

“Yes, King Solomon wants to see you.” So they took her along with them. When she came into King Solomon’s presence she bowed, and when she looked up, she found herself looking into the face of her shepherd!

He has come now. He came the first time as a shepherd; he has come again as a king. This was beyond her expectation, and it was finally her experience. Listen to her:

The voice of my beloved! Behold, he comes leaping upon the mountains, skipping upon the hills. My beloved is like a gazelle or a young stag. Behold, he stands behind our wall; He is looking through the windows, gazing through the lattice. My beloved spoke, and said to me: “Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away. For lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone. The flowers appear on the earth; the time of singing has come, and the voice of the turtledove is heard in our land. The fig tree puts forth her green figs, and the vines with the tender grapes give a good smell. Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away!”

–Song of Solomon 2:8-13

MY FRIEND,
OUR LORD WANTS
TO SEE YOU BEFORE
HE HEARS YOU.

*He wants you
close to Him.*

— DR. J. VERNON MCGEE



Notice that he then says in verse 14, “*O my dove ...*”—the church is to be as harmless as a dove and as wise as a serpent—“... *in the clefts of the rock...*” That’s where His believers are hidden today, secured by the shed blood of Christ. As someone has well said, “I got into the heart of Christ through a spear wound.” In the secret places of the cliffs, His own have access to Him. Notice what He wants from us: “*Let me see your face, let me hear your voice.*” My friend, our Lord wants to see you before He hears you. He wants you close to Him. “*For your voice is sweet, and your face is lovely.*”

Beloved, the expectation and hope of every believer today is simply this: He says, “*My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me*” (John 10:27). One of these days His voice is to sound, “*For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first*” (1 Thessalonians 4:16). Even the dead in Christ are going to hear Him and—together with those who are alive—they are to be caught up and presented to Him as the bride that He loved and for whom He gave Himself!

Some have said the Song of Solomon does not have a climax. But look—it has the same climax as the New Testament closing the Bible. Notice the last verse of Solomon’s song:

Make haste, my beloved, and be like a gazelle or a young stag on the mountains of spices. –Song of Solomon 8:14

The New Testament closes the Bible with the prayer,

And the Spirit and the bride say, “Come!” He who testifies to these things says, “Surely I am coming quickly.” Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus! –Revelation 22:17, 20

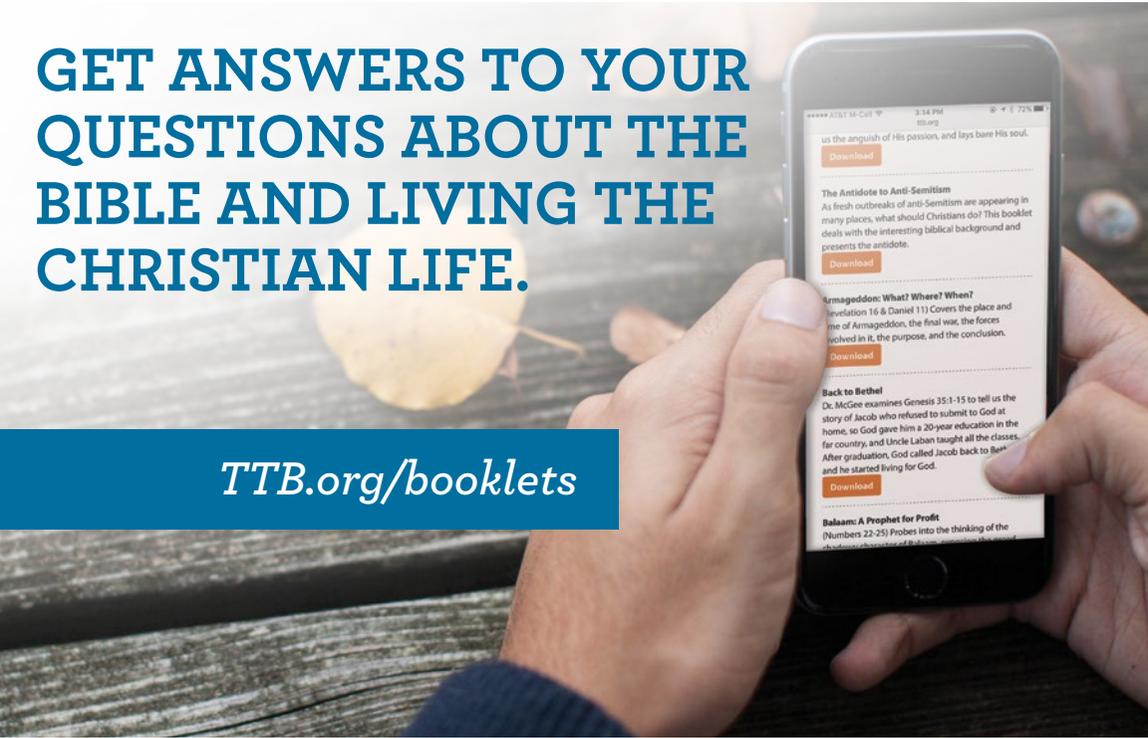
That’s the climax of the Bible, and it’s the highpoint of our faith and of our love for Him and His love for us.

Even so, make haste. Come, my Beloved.

A photograph of two men, one Black and one white, smiling and talking to each other outdoors. They are gesturing with their hands as if in conversation. The background is slightly blurred, showing other people in a park-like setting.

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A close-up photograph of a person's hands holding a smartphone. The phone screen displays a list of booklets with titles and descriptions, and a 'Download' button for each item. The background is a blurred outdoor setting with a wooden bench.

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