



**SONG OF SOLOMON
DEVOTIONAL**

By Pastor Phil Emerson

NAME: _____

OUR DISCIPLESHIP FLOW

At Emmanuel Church, we are passionate about living out the call to be disciples of Jesus Christ, and make it our goal to see His Kingdom come in our lives and the world in which we live. We recognise that in Biblical times, a disciple was someone who followed a teacher or rabbi, not simply to gain head knowledge to pass an examination, but to be fully immersed in the life of the rabbi, and *learn his ways*, so that they in turn could replicate this to the world around them. As Christians, we are now those who have been invited to 'follow' Jesus and all of His ways, and we therefore call ourselves His disciples.

"This is how we know we are in him: Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did." 1 John 2:5,6

We therefore want to take seriously the words of Jesus in Matthew 28:19-20 to make disciples and also commit to an ongoing journey of teaching and discipleship together.

We all have differing personalities and learning styles. At Emmanuel, we recognise this diversity within the church body and therefore desire to support and journey together as we relate with God and each other in some of the following environments:

- **Public (20+)**

In the Bible, we see Jesus seeking to make disciples as He engaged with larger numbers of people, e.g., His interaction with the crowds (Matthew 4:25; Luke 14:25), and the 72 (Luke 10:1-24).

At Emmanuel, we want to use each of our **larger gathered environments** as an opportunity to make disciples, e.g., **Sunday services, Friday Youth/Kids'** environments, **men's/women's** gatherings.

- **Social (10-15)**

Jesus demonstrated the necessity for **smaller accountable relationships** as an essential part of the life of a disciple. He did this by teaching and doing life with his twelve disciples (e.g., Matthew 10).

At Emmanuel, small accountable relationships are offered through:

Lifegroup 12s

These are **gatherings of 10-15 people** who meet bi-weekly in homes or around specific interests, e.g., crafts, football.

- **Personal (2-5)**

As well as having smaller accountable relationships amongst His twelve friends, Jesus also seemed to go to even deeper levels of trust with three in particular – Peter, James and John (Matthew 17; Mark 9). At Emmanuel, we seek to do this through:

Lifegroup 3s

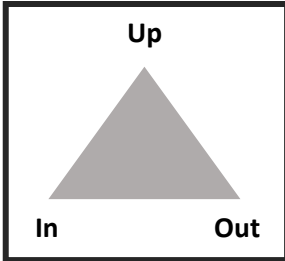
These are smaller **gatherings of 2-5 people** who are committed to transparent and accountable relationships in order to grow together in following Jesus. The aim for these groups is that after 1-2 years, each person in the group would be able to lead a smaller number of people themselves and replicate the process... **disciples making disciples!**

- **Intimate (1-1)**

Jesus regularly withdrew to spend time alone with the Father. This is the ultimate goal of discipleship, that each member of our church family would increasingly spend time alone with the Father and grow in devotion and desire to see the Kingdom come.

A TOOL TO USE

As stated previously, 1 John 2:6 makes it clear that for those of us who call ourselves disciples of Jesus, our goal should be to daily *walk in the ways of Jesus*, our Rabbi. As we examine the New Testament we see that Jesus lived His life based on three relationships: **Up** – with His Father; **In** – with His chosen followers; **Out** – with the hurting world around Him. This is illustrated in the following triangle:



Jesus *taught* and *modelled* out to His disciples how to live into each of these areas in life.

Up

Jesus frequently left the disciples to spend personal time with the Father (Mark 1:35; Luke 5:16). He taught them the significance of prayer, and how to pray and communicate with the Father (Luke 11:1-13). When comparisons with one another or insecurities presented themselves, He spoke into it in love and challenged them into a greater depth of living (Mark 9:33-37; Matthew 18:1-5).

In

Jesus had significant relationships with others in which He intentionally invested (12s and 3s). When He went to engage with the Father He brought the three with Him (Matthew 17:1). He taught them and modelled out the significance of Sabbath and rhythms of rest (Mark 6:31). He demonstrated with His life the significance of generosity and sacrificial love for others (John 13:1-17).

Out

Jesus personally lived a life that engaged with the crowds and the broken world around Him. He healed the sick (Matthew 8:1-4), fed the poor (Mark 6:30-44), and cast out demons (Matthew 8:28-34). But with the people who were closest to Him, He challenged them to do the same (Mark 6:37), and when they took risks themselves He critiqued and gave honest feedback to call out more for them (Luke 10:17-20).

As we spend time alone or together in this devotional, we want to help and encourage you to engage in each of these ways – UP, IN, and OUT.

HOW TO USE THE BOOK

First

If you haven't already done so, please take a second to fill in your name on the inside of the front cover. There'll be a lot of identical books floating around, and we don't want yours to get lost.

Prepare

Get ready for each session by spending some time to invite the Holy Spirit to speak to you. The Bible is a written word (logos), which becomes a living word (rhema) as the Holy Spirit breathes upon it and speaks directly to our lives through it.

Commit

Commit to the journey. Discipleship is not a commitment to a moment, but to a lifetime journey. As you personally commit to journeying with God daily, commit to others by sharing what you are learning (possibly in Lifegroup 12s or 3s), and in this way encouraging one another in what God is saying.

Reflect & Respond

Each day, as you spend personal time with God, we encourage you to ask the following two questions:

- 1) What is God saying to me?
- 2) What am I going to do about it?

This is how we become doers and not just hearers of what God is saying.

INTRODUCTION TO SONG OF SOLOMON

The Jews viewed their nation as being married to Jehovah and for this reason they read portions of Song of Solomon annually on the eighth day of Passover. Reading Song of Solomon reminded them to love the Lord their God with all their heart. In ancient times, these songs were called ‘Canticles’. In 1 Kings 4 we are told Solomon spoke 3,000 proverbs and 1,005 songs, so if this book is the song of all the songs, then it is ‘top of the pops’ stuff!

Song of Solomon has a history of controversy as it is a song about love between a man and a woman, including the physical dimension. Indeed, it celebrates the joys of the marital relationship. While I love the explicit intimacy and romance (I’m a bit of a romantic), some of its intimate language seems a little embarrassing. Early Jewish expositors decided that the Song applied romantic love to the relationship between Yahweh and Israel, which I believe to be true.

Song of Solomon can help us develop a healthy view of the goodness of romance in courtship and marriage. Some of the cultures down through the ages have displayed downright abuse of human sexuality. What God ordained as beautiful and to be enjoyed in a covenanting relationship, the devil has subtly perverted and disgraced. If you are married, consider doing a study of the book with your spouse. If you are single, read it with your love relationship with Yahweh in mind, or read it with the view of preparing to commit yourself totally to the one God might give to you in marriage. All in all, read this beautiful book with a view of the love that Christ has for His bride, the church. You will be blessed by this for sure.

Bible, journal, pen, and cuppa at the ready. Off we go again. Hope you enjoy!
Phil

Read

Song of Solomon 1

Live

The wisest man in all the world made some grave errors around relationships. The precept of one man for one woman had long escaped his mind. Although, having so many women around him (1,005 to be precise), maybe that is why the Holy Spirit chose him to speak to us about love, romance, and sex. We must place our confidence in this Scripture as being the truth as to how God views authentic and Biblical romance, love, sex, and marriage.

The romance is between King Solomon and a young Shulamite girl. The book begins without holding back as to where things are headed. The message is going to be love, romance, and intimacy. We are given a song which details what both lovers were thinking as they progressed through their romance and marriage. In this chapter, we see what the girl was thinking after she had observed Solomon from a distance. She didn't go and share her feelings with him, but she patiently waited to see what he would do. It is clear that she was dying about him, desiring to kiss him. This is not referring to a customary peck-on-the-cheek kind of kiss, but a romantic kiss, as she makes very clear. She noticed that Solomon had looked after himself right down to splashing on some good old aftershave! Women appreciate it when men take care of themselves. The opposite is true too; the boys like it when their girls look after themselves!

It would seem that Solomon had a high reputation, enjoying great respect, and all the young girls fancied him. Makes us realise how beautiful God's love is for us, far more than any physical love could attain. The worst thing about not sensing God's love is that we're left to the shallow waters of our own counsel. We never want to sabotage our trust in His love. One thing we can know for sure, His steadfast love for us is unquestionable and inexhaustible.

Pray

Father, though my rejoicing and singing may sometimes be reduced to a still, small voice, I thank You for dealing bountifully with me through the finished work of Jesus. May the language of the poet entice my heart to run away with You once again. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

Solomon has treated his woman like a lady, as every man should do with his partner. He made her feel so special that she thinks she is the best thing on planet earth. He made her feel confident and beautiful in herself, no longer worrying about her darkened skin. I think verse 7 is very powerful, not to awaken love until the right time. A major theme of the book begins here by saying that sexual love must not be awakened until it pleases, which is only after marriage as sexual love completes the romantic bond.

Lovers depend on time together and a journey allows them rare moments to speak with and be physically close to one another. Like the woman, the man treasures these hidden opportunities to be together. She compares her lover to a gazelle or a stag, animals that are fast and able to run from predators. Their love allows both of them to escape their ordinary duties and focus their attention on each other. Theirs is a journey of joy, longing, and adventure.

Verse 4 is one of the verses sung about more than any other. Some believe it to refer to the marriage supper of the Lamb. Yahweh has led us to the table of salvation with a banner of love over us and around us. This is true intimacy and simply beautiful imagery for us today.

Pray

Father, I thank You today for Jesus who awaits the coming home of His bride, the church. In the language of the poet today, let me pray...

“See! The winter is past; the rains are over and gone. Flowers appear on the earth; the season of singing has come, the cooing of doves is heard in our land. The fig tree forms its early fruit; blossoming vines spread their fragrance. Arise, come, my darling; my beautiful one, come with me. 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.”

When I read passages like this, I become aware of how fickle I have made love, almost like ‘love me and I will love you’. But this love is not so. This is poured out, raw, undeserved love. Thank You, Father. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

Many commentators believe that the events in today's reading are actually a dream sequence. The imagery reflects the bride's longing to consummate her love with the groom. After searching through the city streets, she finally finds him and clings to him in love. Those who go through the dark night of the soul are like her. They spend many hours searching for God and maybe this is God's purpose for such trials; they are not meant to be a punishment but a blessing, intended to create spiritual hunger. God uses these times to renew our longing for spiritual intimacy with Him. When we experience a dark night of the soul, it is tempting to search for a way to jump start our spiritual experience to regain a sense of God's presence, yet the best strategy is simply to wait. Waiting does not mean we are inactive; we continue to serve God and practice the basic disciplines of the Christian life.

One lesson God teaches us during a time of spiritual desertion is the importance of faithfulness. If you feel deserted by God, follow the advice of the psalmist in Psalm 37:34 *"Wait for the Lord and keep His way."* After all, He made you and me in His own image and redeemed us through Jesus, His perfect Son. While it may be difficult, we need to thank God that He looks with compassion on us. You may feel like you are searching and not finding. Often my prayer is that God would take away the confusion and frustration which infects our hearts, that He would break down the walls that separate us, uniting us in bonds of love.

It's kind of ironic that on the day I am writing this devotional, I have a friend who has just lost his wife and lover of thirty-five years. I have been trying to walk him through the pain. Sometimes in life we need to trust God more than understand Him. Eternal eyes are of utmost importance at these times because if we just look through a temporal lens, we could easily give up.

Pray

Father, Your love for me is unequalled and unfathomed. Every time I think about it, I feel like singing the chorus, "Lord, You have my heart; I will search for Yours. Let me be to You a sacrifice." In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Read

Song of Solomon 4

Live

We can lift our mobile phone, dial a number, and listen as a stranger invites us to imagine explicit sex acts. Even films strive not only for filthy language but also for a quota of scenes advertising immorality. The world recognises the importance of sex and has set about distorting sexuality, so much so that Christians have become somewhat embarrassed about being sexual creatures. Reading Song of Solomon, especially verses that erotically and yet sensitively portray sexual love, reminds us that Hollywood didn't invent sex. God did. It reminds us that sex isn't evil but is a gift from our Creator who made us male and female, and designed our bodies for every sexual delight. We Christians have to recapture this. We need to purify our marriages of any residue of shame, and realise that God has sanctified this act. We need to not only announce to the world that sex in Christian marriage is a pure and fulfilling delight, but also commit ourselves to exploring that delight fully with our spouse. It is perhaps here that Song of Solomon makes its greatest contribution to our lives. It reminds us that sex-talk can be beautiful, and need not be dirty. It reminds us that true spirituality does not rule out full enjoyment of the sexual side of married life, but actually promotes it.

Sometimes passages like this one today can leave us feeling broken and loved at the same time. I love the little phrase that could so easily be missed in verse 12, "*private garden*". I think he is referring to his lover's virginity which, in the covenant of love and marriage, belonged to him and him alone. Virginity is considered old-fashioned today, yet the scriptures clearly tell us that sex outside of love, commitment, covenant, and marriage is just cheap. Meditating on this passage ought to convict us about how we have allowed the world to taint our view of sex and love. This bride was as refreshing as a spring to Solomon, which says a lot about love and sex in God's viewpoint.

Pray

Father, sometimes I am quick to shower the riches of Your kindness, tolerance, and patience on people who are broken and struggling, while I neglect those who are close to me. Forgive me and help me to love as You love, with a pure, unadulterated heart. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Read

Song of Solomon 5

Live

I read this challenge recently from D.L. Moody: *“God will not accept a divided heart; He must be absolute monarch. There is not room in your heart for two thrones.”* I think it is because of this that God sometimes leads us through difficulties that test our motives and enable us to develop an undivided heart. This is what happened to the bride in Song of Solomon. We are now some time after the wedding and while their love had matured, problems had set in causing delay and a holding back. The delay was costly. She had cooled off in her intimacy towards her husband and had declined his advances. By the time she went to renew her love, he had gone. She goes in search of him but did not find him immediately and during her travels encountered city watchmen who mistreated her and stole her cloak (which some scholars suggest was a wedding gift from her groom).

The bride’s experience is true to what happens to human relationships and our relationship with God too. In marriage, neglect inevitably leads to a loss of intimacy and if we look for help from the wrong source, we may end up really hurt. I have found that God often uses the very thing that the enemy would use to destroy us to drive us closer to Him. This poor girl was out in the cold and by now realising the mistake she had made. Tie this into your relationship with God today. Don’t decline His advances towards you and allow your love to grow cold. Rather, realise how you love Him and need Him in your life. You would never have got this far without God, after all. We live in a vulnerable world as a vulnerable people where nothing seems to be stable and fewer things get a chance at becoming vintage. The environment and weather patterns are predictably unpredictable. Old friendships get strained through marriage splits, job losses, and the busyness of life. World news is usually bad news, and financial crises rock the world. Yet there is one glorious exception. God is still in full control!

Pray

Father, Your unfailing love for me will not be shaken. Thank You that this is one thing I can absolutely count on, the one reality beyond all shaking and shifting. It’s because You first love me that I love You. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Read

Song of Solomon 6

Live

I love verse 3, *"I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine."* I love how we can say this in our relationship with our spouse. No matter how close our relationship with a parent, we are to leave that bond and cleave to our spouse. But I love the spiritual aspect of this verse even more. Imagine, we can say to God today, *"I am my beloved's and He is mine."* This blesses and blows me away.

Three important facts lay the groundwork for this couple's restored relationship. First, she knows her husband well enough to know where to look. He, in turn, knows his bride well enough to not force intimacy until she was ready. Second, both continue to be committed to the relationship. And third, as soon as both are ready, they take time together to restore their relationship. This principle is true in the marriage relationship; one way to keep the romance alive is to know what interests the one you love. Sex is viewed in this world as what one can get rather than what one may give in the marriage covenant. Yet the Bible teaches us to prefer one another, and that's a good practice to get into.

The mention of other women makes us wonder if Solomon wrote this when he had more than one wife. We know according to 1 Kings 11 that he eventually had 700 wives and 300 concubines. I have often wondered how he could write like he does about love in this book. I have a few ideas ... Solomon may have written this as a young man on the occasion of his first love, his TRUE love; someone had to be his first love. Or perhaps Solomon wrote this as a middle-aged man, meaning that he wrote about an ideal that he did not live out or benefit from. Or maybe Solomon wrote this as a man late in life, having tasted the good and ideal but then having wasted the vast majority of his life upon foolish romances.

Pray

Father, forgive me for being selfish in my relationships, for wanting myself to be fulfilled and happy before thinking of others. I want to seek You first, in accordance with Matthew 6:33, knowing that You never run out on the promise to add everything else on. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Read

Song of Solomon 7

Live

Solomon writes this song like a love letter, describing her beauty. To him, she can do no wrong; he can find no fault in her physical appearance; she is captivating. To him, she is the source of great pleasure and he delights in her. How wonderful to be fully loved and adored! It satisfies a deep hunger in our soul and lifts our self-worth. We should delight in one another within the confines of marital privacy. Both clothed and unclothed, adorned and unadorned, scented and unscented, married couples should regard the loveliness of one another.

Some people refer to their first days as a believer as their ‘honeymoon with Christ’. In the first rush of belief, we are overwhelmed by God’s love and it seems to spill over into every aspect of our lives. Ask God today to renew your sense of overwhelming love – both your love for God and your awareness of how deeply and completely He loves you in return.

Looking at this passage through the eternal lens of Jesus and His bride, the church, we can see the glorious clothing we have. What honour we have as saints. Having put on Christ, the church is distinguished by their beautiful and glorious apparel. They put on the doctrine of God and Jesus as their Saviour. Consistent believers honour Jesus, telling everyone they can about Him. God takes delight in the gathering and ordinances of His people, and loves it when the fruit of His grace is evident in them. When applied to the church and to each faithful Christian, all this denotes the beauty of holiness in which they shall be presented to their heavenly Bridegroom. Even though we sin against God in thought, word, and deed, there is great assurance to know that through Jesus we are completely forgiven, declared righteous, and a beloved child. When we confess our sins, God is neither shocked nor informed. Our need of His grace is much greater than we realise, but our standing in His grace is also much more glorious than we could hope or imagine.

Pray

Father, nothing compares with the treasures I have received in just knowing You. So, here’s my cry... Come, Holy Spirit, come. Create in me both the will and wisdom to forgive as I’ve been forgiven. In Jesus’ strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Read

Song of Solomon 8

Live

Public affection between lovers was not allowed in many ancient countries which is why she says in verse 1, 'I wish you were my brother,' so they could at least cuddle without fear of criticism. Everyone wants to be loved like that, to be pursued at the risk of death and to be desired in an unstoppable way. That is the type of love described at the close of Song of Solomon, a love "*as strong as death*" (verse 6). Love is described as jealous in a positive sense. This is not the jealousy that comes from insecurity, but the jealousy that is strong and steadfast and all-consuming. God's love is described as a jealous love throughout the Old Testament. The Apostle Paul also mentions that he is jealous for his fellow believers with "*godly jealousy*" (2 Corinthians 11:2).

The New Testament word for 'jealous' is translated from the Greek word 'zelos', which carries the idea of warmth and heat and is related to our English word 'zealous'. What are you zealous for today? If you are married, are you zealous for your spouse? And most of all, are you zealous for God? The battle for our heart's trust is relentless and only God is worthy of our full worship, love, and trust. David could say in Psalm 20:7, "*Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the LORD our God.*" In our day, the battle for the heart continues. Some trust in their goodness and discipline and niceness, but we trust in the finished work of Jesus and the gift of His perfect righteousness. Some trust in their spouse's attention and their children's affection, but we trust in the steadfast love and great delight our God has for us in Jesus.

I love this little book. Sometimes I wonder how it found its way into the pages of holy writ, and yet here it is, an expression of the deep unadulterated love of a man and a woman, ultimately displaying Christ's love for His bride, the church. Remember, Christ loves the church, having given Himself for her. I trust you have enjoyed this book!

Pray

Father, some trust in their physical fitness, looks, and sensuality; but in sickness and in health, in our youthfulness and in our aging, we trust in the truly beautiful and all-powerful one – Jesus. In His strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

