

*Transformed*  
*by*  
**Love**

*(The Story of  
the Song of Solomon)*

*Kevin King*

TRANSFORMED BY LOVE

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It has been my wish to make this book available as widely as possible with a minimum of restrictions on its reproduction, by whatever means. But it was also my desire to include the text of the song itself, so that the reader would see this before reading my own comments.

Unfortunately, the quoting of entire books of the Bible presents copyright problems for the publishers of most modern translations. To avoid these, I found it necessary to choose between using an older, less readable, translation, or producing a rendering of the Song in my own words. I opted for the latter, as it let me take account of the combined wisdom of many translators and scholars rather than being tied to a single version. It is difficult to know how to properly acknowledge the efforts of so many translators when I have at the same time been consciously endeavouring not to plagiarise their work. All I can reasonably say is that my sources have included, but not been limited to, the American Standard Version, Authorised Version, Darby, Green's Literal Translation, LXX – An English Translation, New International Version, New King James Version, Revised Standard Version, Russian Synodal Translation, Young's Literal Translation, Young's Analytical Concordance and the Hebrew lexicons of the New American Standard Version and Online Bible.

Only when this book was almost complete did I come across the World English Bible (WEB), which is being produced specifically for the purpose of making a modern translation freely available in the Public Domain. Had I known of this at the outset, it is unlikely that I would have bothered with my own version: but having done so I decided to stick with it. However, I am delighted to have discovered the World English Bible and applaud the efforts of its translators. I have therefore made use of the WEB for all quotations other than those of the Song itself, unless otherwise stated.

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## PREFACE

There are times in our lives when we go earnestly seeking after God; and there are times when God simply takes hold of us. Although this book is written as an encouragement to us to seek after Him, I can only begin by confessing that it is not the result of my spirituality in seeking God: but of his love, in taking hold of me.

In January of 2003 the church of which I was a member was going through hard times: but, as had been customary for many years, we began the year with a 'week' of prayer and fasting – well, a few days, at any rate. Oh, I was firmly convinced of the value of prayer and fasting, and resolved to participate as fully as practicable: but the most I was really hoping for was some clearer insight into the way forward for ourselves and the church.

Then God stepped in. I could not attempt to describe this intervention, without in some way cheapening it: suffice to say it hit me with the force of a spiritual earthquake. Apart from my conversion, 38 years previously, it was the most life-changing experience I have ever had: and left me in a state of spiritual shell-shock for months afterwards.

I began seeking God more earnestly than I had done in years. It was like being back in spiritual primary school: and one of the first lessons the Lord began impressing on me was the need to rediscover my first love. In one sense, that was not difficult: I was now spending two to three times as long in

prayer as I had done previously; and finding even then that it never seemed enough.

But where should I turn to learn how this relationship was meant to be? I felt the Lord leading me to look again at the Song of Solomon. Day after day, I would be amazed at the things He showed me through its pages. I read it, meditated on it, and re-read it.

At first, that was all I could do. I had no idea what to do or expect next. I had been due to go on a teaching trip to a Bible School in South America: but now there was only one subject on my heart, and I was manifestly unfit to teach it. The trip was cancelled.

But gradually I began to get a sense that, somehow, God wanted me to act as a catalyst; encouraging others to also seek a deeper intimacy with, and commitment to, Himself. After a month or so, I began sharing some of the lessons I had been learning from the Song with the folk in our church. I would like to say that there was an instant revival – but there wasn't; though folk were blessed and challenged by the message. So I went on seeking God, frequently returning to the Song for fresh insight and encouragement.

A year later, I finally made that trip to South America; still very much as a novice learner in the school of faith and love, but making the message of the Song the prime focus of my ministry. A good number of the students testified that it had challenged and encouraged them. One, all unknowing, brought a prophecy that told me to use the pen that God had put in my hand. This, and other encouragements, finally persuaded me that this sense that had been growing in my spirit was not just my own idea.

The first draft was completed in 2004, Since then I have expounded this theme many times, made some revisions and added an epilogue. But the substance remains the same. So I now offer this book, confident of its message and praying that the Holy Spirit will take it and use it to encourage you, as He reveals to you the depth and intensity of his love *for you*, and its transforming power in your life.

Kevin King, February 2012.



# INTRODUCTION

## **About Solomon (1:1)**

<sup>1</sup>*The Song of Songs, by Solomon.*

The opening verse attributes this song to King Solomon, who was a prolific song writer and noted for his great wisdom. This alone would make it very special: but the expression, 'Song of Songs,' signifies that there was something

Even if Solomon only meant it was the best of his own songs, this would be quite some claim; for 1 Kings 4:32 tells us that he wrote 1,005 of them!

about this song that made it more important than any other. It can't have been the melody – it isn't even recorded – so what is it about this song that makes it so exceptional? It is my hope that you will find the answer to this for yourself as the story unfolds.

### *One who knew the grace of God*

Solomon was the heir of King David, who had been anointed by God in place of Saul, Israel's first king. But Solomon's choice as king, above that of David's older sons, is an amazing example of the grace of God. He was David's second son by Bathsheba; who had been the wife of Uriah the Hittite, one of David's military commanders. David had committed adultery with her and then, on learning she was pregnant, arranged for Uriah to be put in a battle situation where he was sure to die; subsequently marrying Bathsheba. One of the

consequences of this appalling act was the death of the child; and one could easily have supposed that God would not want the offspring of such a union to have any place in his future plans for Israel.

*But the grace of God is so powerful that it utterly disregards our past, and sees only the potential we have to become in Him.* When Solomon was born, God again sent to David the very same prophet that had pronounced the death sentence against their first child. But this time it was to give Solomon a very special name, 'Jedidiah' – 'beloved of God.' (For the full story, see 2 Sam 11:1–12:25.) So Solomon grew up with a deep awareness of the life-changing, destiny-shaping power of God's grace.

### *His wisdom*

David appointed Solomon his heir when he was near death, with his older sons competing for the throne. But when God offered to give Solomon anything he wanted, his request was for wisdom to rule God's people well. In response, God not only made him the wisest man that ever lived, but also gave him wealth, honour and long life (1 Kings 1:1-53 & 3:5-28).

### *His downfall*

But, no matter how great and sincere they may be, wisdom and good intentions cannot preserve us if we rely on them to keep us from evil, rather than simply depend on God and obey his Word.

As we will discover, Solomon's Song reveals an amazing vision of kingship and love. But it is a vision that goes far beyond the ability of any mere man to fulfil; and part of Solomon's error was to think that he could do so.

Long before, God had warned Moses that any future king must not '*multiply wives to himself, that his heart not turn away*' (Deut 17:17). Disregarding this, Solomon married one wife after another. When he wrote the Song, he already had 60 wives and 80 concubines (Song 6:8): but he ended up with 700 wives and 300 concubines!

Solomon was a skilled diplomat: and he made many alliances by marrying daughters of foreign kings. Such marriages were even more expressly forbidden because of the idolatrous practices of the surrounding nations. So, by accepting the gods his wives worshipped, and even building shrines for them, he further undermined his own relationship with God.

***What's a concubine?***

A concubine was a wife of secondary rank, typically a slave.

Though not having all the legal rights of a true wife, she could still attain great status in the household, if she found favour with her husband.

The result is that the book of Ecclesiastes shows him, as an old man, bemoaning the folly and emptiness of so much of his life. Also, as a direct result of his excesses, the kingdom was split in two during the reign of his son, Rehoboam (see 1 Kings 11:1-13).

## **Why is it in the Bible?**

Many have asked this question. After all, it's a love song about a man and woman that scarcely even mentions God. And the descriptions used in places are very sensual – in fact, the Jewish Rabbis considered it unsuitable for anyone under the age of 30! Nevertheless, they recognised that the book contained a portrayal of love as it was meant to be; and wisely saw that a true understanding of love had to be an integral part of our relationships with one another and with God.

And what of the conduct of its author? Many of us would have been inclined to exclude Solomon's writings on this ground alone. But one of the lessons we learn from the Old Testament is that *all men are flawed: yet despite this God uses us to accomplish his purposes*; and even the least worthy may at times display deep spiritual wisdom and insight.

The style of the Old Testament is frequently to simply record what people did or said, with little or even no moral comment. The careless will simply read it, and pass on: but the wise will ponder the implications and consequences of their actions and learn. As Paul says, *'Every Scripture is God-breathed*

*and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.'* (2 Tim 3:16-17.)

### ***More than a love song?***

Many Rabbis viewed this song as an allegory of the relationship between God and Israel: and Christians, for their part, have seen it as an allegory of Jesus and the church. For Solomon, as I have already hinted, I think it was a vision of kingship and love. But, though it exceeded the capacity of any mere man to fulfil, it *is* perfectly and completely fulfilled in one person, and one person only – Jesus, the King of Love.

### **Who is it about?**

Various suggestions have been made for the identity of Solomon's bride, ranging from a simple shepherdess, through Abishag the Shunamite, to Pharaoh's daughter or the Queen of Sheba. I very much doubt this was Abishag: but I also doubt that she was of royal birth, for reasons we will discuss later.

Abishag was a sort of half-wife to David in his old age and is known to have been exceptionally beautiful (1 Kings 1:3-4). But the link to this song is tenuous, being based entirely on a similarity between 'Shunamite' and 'Shulamite' in 6:13.

It is very unlikely because it was considered the ultimate insult for a son to take his father's wife (see 2 Samuel 16:21). Abishag's marital status may have been in doubt: but when Solomon's older brother Adonijah asked to marry her, Solomon had him summarily executed for merely suggesting it (see 1 Kings 2:13-25, *cf.* Lev. 20:11, Gen 35:22 & 49:3-4). And if Solomon had planned to marry her himself, it would probably have been early in his reign: not when he already had 60 queens and 80 concubines (Song 6:8).

A shepherdess then? Well, yes and no...

### ***Who is speaking, and to whom?***

The book has three main characters:

- The king, Solomon.

- The woman, referred to as the Shulamite in 6:13. I will refer to her as 'the Seeker,' because that is what she is doing – seeking to be closer to her king.
- The Daughters of Jerusalem, who could be described as the 'King Solomon Fan Club' – a band of young women who follow the king wherever they can. They want him to notice them: but their love is more superficial than the Seeker's.

One of the many difficulties in interpreting this book is the fact that it is not always clear who is speaking at any given moment. Where there is particular doubt, I will try to explain the implications of the differing viewpoints.

### **Problems of translation**

There are two particular areas of difficulty when translating this book.

Firstly, the subject-matter means that some of the words, expressions and allusions are used only rarely, or not at all, in other surviving Hebrew literature. In such cases, scholars have to attempt to deduce their meanings from other words that appear to come from a common original or 'root' word.

Secondly, the book is written in verse. This means that the choice of words and phrasing is partly determined by the rhythm of the verse itself. Consequently, some of the words chosen are not those that would normally be used, or else are used in unusual ways. It is not possible to translate the song into English verse without further confusing its meaning: but users of some translations will see that the original lines are kept separate or, as in the New King James Version, the start of a new line in the original is marked with a capital letter.

Scholars do not always agree on the best translation. In making the version that accompanies this text I have concentrated on the narrative, not attempting to render this as verse, and generally followed the scholarly consensus as to the meaning. Where there are particularly significant disagreements between scholars, or where I am inclined to follow a minority

opinion, I have tried to explain the alternatives and why I prefer one above another.

But that is enough introduction for now. Let's look at the song itself...

## HUNGRY FOR LOVE (1:2-6)

### **It's the Way You Love Me (1:2-3)**

#### *The things you do (1:2)*

<sup>2</sup>*May he kiss me with the kisses of his mouth!*

*For your lovings are better than wine.*

Right from the outset, our seeker makes it clear to anyone who will listen that she is hungry for intimacy with her king. She doesn't just want to be one of those who admires him from a distance.

But the reason she gives the king is particularly revealing: though the English translation does not do it justice.

I occasionally travel to Russia, and have an elementary knowledge of Russian. So, in an effort to make up for my lack of conversational partners, I frequently read from the Russian Orthodox Bible. I was doing this when I began this study; and this verse brought me up short, sending me scurrying for my Russian dictionary – because the word it used here for 'love' was one that I had never seen before. I discovered that it meant 'caresses.'

In fact, the Hebrew uses the plural form of a word, '*dowd*,' that we will discuss in more detail later: but which roughly translates here as 'lovings.' When used in this way it includes the concepts of both physical acts of sexual love (such as caresses) and practical actions motivated by love. But the key

point to grasp is that she is not talking about the *fact* that he loves her, but about the *way* he loves her.

It is wonderful to know that someone loves you: but the truth is that much of the time such knowledge stays in our heads and doesn't really stir our heart and emotions. However, when people *do* things that demonstrate how much they love us, theory comes alive. We *feel* loved, and are motivated to love them in return.

I have been very happily married now for over thirty years to a very wonderful wife. But one of the important lessons I have learned is that, if I really want to stir up her affections for me, the most successful strategy is not to make big speeches or dramatic gestures, and certainly not to simply assume that she should know by now that I love her. Instead, throughout the time that we are together, I will look for little things that I can do to show I care; a quick kiss or hug here, a helping hand with the chores there, and so on... Maybe at first she won't notice what I'm up to: but sooner or later she will – and the cumulative effect is well worth it!

It is just the same in our relationship with Jesus. As we become more intimate with Him we experience his love, not just as a fact to be believed, but as a daily awareness of the countless ways in which He lavishes his love on us: and the more aware we become of this, the more our own love is stirred. But if we fail to develop this intimacy then, although we may still acknowledge his love as a matter of spiritual truth, it will feel more like a theory than a fact to us.

### *The blessing you bring (1:3)*

<sup>3</sup>*Because of the fragrance of your excellent oils, your name is like out-poured oil. The virgins love you.*

Wherever the king went, the fragrant oils with which he had been anointed would sweeten the air. And his liberality meant that those in his court would also receive whatever they needed, regardless of expense. This was so typical of him that the very mention of his name would evoke powerful memories



of the sweetness of his presence, and stir a maiden's heart with desire for him.

But notice also the honesty of this particular admission. No doubt, as king, he was entitled to the devotion of his subjects: but the truth of the matter is that he is desired because his presence brings blessing.

In the same way, it is undoubtedly true that we should revere God's name simply because of who He is. But the reality is that, *'We love him, because he first loved us.'* (1 Jn 4:19.) I never really loved God, or was capable of loving Him, until I began to understand just how much He had done for me.

### **Drawn into his chambers (1:4)**

<sup>4</sup>*Draw me! We will run after you!*

*The king has brought me into his inner chambers.*

*We rejoice and are glad in you. We will remember your lovings more than wine. They are so right to love you.*

Renderings of this verse vary, depending upon the translator's interpretation of who is speaking, and when. Some translations suggest this verse is spoken partly by the seeker and partly by the Daughters of Jerusalem. For my part, I incline to the view that the Seeker is speaking both on her own and the daughter's behalf.

I would suggest that there are three vital principles at work here.

#### ***The King must do the drawing***

Firstly, all translations acknowledge that she needs the king to take the initiative. If he did not, she would have no hope of coming anywhere near him (the king's guards would have seen to that!) and any thoughts of true love would be nothing more than a pipe-dream.

Indeed, if he had taken no interest in her, she would probably never have loved him at all. Forced to only view him from a distance, he would have seemed so privileged and remote, that in time her feelings would more likely have tended

towards envy than love. But all that changed the day he smiled on her. If the king wanted her, who dare stand in her way?

But she isn't just speaking of a single action. Her words imply an ongoing sense of her need for him to go on drawing her; and a commitment on her part that, if he will only do this, she will keep on after him.

In the same way, we also need God to take the initiative by his grace and stir our hearts if we are to truly seek Him. Jesus said, *'No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him.'* (Jn 6:44.) The idea of a mere man having an intimate personal relationship with the Being who created this universe – compared to whom we are less than a speck of dust – would be unthinkable, were it not that He has taken the initiative in calling us to Himself.

Also, the weakness of our human nature is such that, without constant encouragement from Him, our love will all too easily fade and grow cold. But, just as she pleads with her king to draw her, so we can ask Jesus: and find He has already promised to respond: *'Ask, and it will be given you. Seek, and you will find. Knock, and it will be opened for you.'* (Mt 7:7.) *'Come to me, all you who labor and are heavily burdened, and I will give you rest.'* (Mt 11:28.) *'The Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" He who hears, let him say, "Come!" He who is thirsty, let him come. He who desires, let him take the water of life freely.'* (Rev 22:17.)

### *If I am drawn, others will follow*

The traditional rendering of the opening words is, 'Draw me – we will run after you.'<sup>1</sup> This implies that, if the seeker is drawn by the king, others will be inspired to follow him too.

Put simply, passionate love is infectious. This principle can actually be seen in action later in the song.

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<sup>1</sup> The literal rendering of these words is, 'Draw me – after you – we run.'

I am doubtful about the alternative rendering of 'we run' as, 'Let us make haste.' It would seem a bit premature for her to be telling the king to get a move on at this stage in their relationship. But nor is there any obvious reason to suggest that these words are interjected by the king.

Reader, please hear this. This book is about you and your relationship with God. You need to get your eyes off everyone else and onto Jesus.

If you are in Christian leadership, this can be really difficult (it can be even if you are not!) But, as a Bible teacher, no sooner did God start showing me something new from the song than I found myself mentally composing a sermon, telling people all about it! And God has had to repeatedly bring me up short on this, telling me to forget about teaching others and learn these lessons for myself.

(That is why the trip to South America had to be cancelled, and why it was over a year since God began showing me these things before I began to feel I could start working on this book. Not that this means I have finished learning. I know now, more deeply than ever, that you can never finish learning about the love of Jesus; and the only effective way of introducing others to his love is to be ever more filled with it myself.)

I'm acutely conscious that one of the chief maladies of Western Christianity is that we have lost our first love for Jesus, and I long to see it restored. But, although it may be possible to exhort and cajole people into submission to God, it is impossible to cajole them into loving Him. Many have burned themselves out trying.

But if we will stop trying to figure out how we can persuade others to love God more, and instead let Him stir our own hearts to follow Him more passionately, our love will become contagious. We will reproduce what we *are*, not what we *say*.

### *The King wants me as a personal friend*

The word translated as 'inner chambers' doesn't mean the ceremonial halls, where the king would hold his royal courts and banquets: but neither is it his bedchamber. It means the private inner rooms where the king would spend time with his close friends, trusted servants, advisers and his own family. By bringing the seeker here, Solomon was declaring that she had become his trusted, personal friend and confidante.

Think of it! This was a favour far greater than being invited to sit at the king's table and drink the king's wines at a banquet, heady as such an experience might have been (in more ways than one!). Many a famous and noble guest at the king's banquets would never pass the portals into his inner rooms: yet here she was, being drawn into such a relationship.

One of the most amazing things that the Bible teaches is that the Almighty God wants the same kind of relationship with us. It is not enough for Him that we are his subjects: He wants us to be his family, friends and confidantes.

If you come from a Christian background, it should not surprise you to hear that God wants to be your friend; for the Bible is full of this message, from God's original communion with Adam (Gen 2:19) through Abraham, the friend of God (Gen 18:16-33), Jesus, who taught us to call God our Father (Lk 11:2), and on to the closing chapters of Revelation (Rev 21:7). But those from a non-Christian background may well be staggered by such a claim.

To some, God is far too exalted, and man far too insignificant by comparison, for God ever to acknowledge him in such terms (see, for example Bilquis Sheik's wonderful testimony, 'I Dared to Call Him Father'). And a Buddhist's concept of God is too impersonal. For many modern scientists also, the universe seems far too vast and impersonal for man to have any significance at all.

And yet, logically, a God of such awesome power must be capable of having a personal relationship with us, if He wants to; just as a king may make a friend of the very lowliest of his subjects, should he care enough to do so.

This is the greatest privilege of them all. But even so it is all too easy to overlook this and be seduced by lesser things.

It may seem superfluous to say that such an expression of love was of far more value than even the very best of the king's wines. Yet, there were probably many in Solomon's kingdom who would have valued a place at his banqueting tables – the thrill of the occasion, the adulation of the onlookers, and the sheer pleasure of the food and wine – more highly than a place in those inner rooms, where no-one else can see you. It is so easy to end up loving the gifts more than the giver.

There is a tragic irony here. For Solomon clearly saw the temptation that his riches presented to those on whom he lavished them. He wanted them to love him, and to be his true friends; not just to love the things he provided for them. And so in his song we have the seeker and Daughters of Jerusalem saying, 'We will remember your lovings [it is this word, *'dowd,'* again; meaning, *'acts of love'*] more than wine.' In saying this, he presents the best possible antidote to such seduction. It is that they should regard every blessing, whether of wine or friendship, as an act of his love, inspiring them to deeper love for the lover.

Yet it was this that Solomon himself ultimately failed to do. It is clear that in his youth he enjoyed an intimate relationship with God. But he became so preoccupied with affairs of state, and his affections for his many wives and subjects, that in the end they meant more to him than the love of God, who gave him them. So he ignored God's wishes in pursuing his own; and his relationship with God grew cold.

But Solomon is only one example of many who have confused God's blessings with the reality of personal intimacy. Samson thought that all was well as long as the Spirit's anointing gave him strength. Saul was more concerned about keeping the good opinion of the people than that of God. Peter, on the mount of transfiguration, fell so in love with the glory of that place that he did not want to leave; and had to be reminded of his primary duty to hear and obey God's Son.

And it is still true today. We can experience great personal blessing and emotional highs during times of public praise and worship, and in Divine visitations, when God makes his royal presence felt amongst his people. Some may receive great adulation because of the mighty ways they have been used as servants of God. But we need to realise that it is our intimate experience of God – expressed in the obedience that flows from this, and our desire to be available for Him in the 'inner rooms' of our prayer life, where only He sees us – that is the true measure of our love and really shapes our destiny.