

The Dove in the Rock, the Little Foxes, and the New Cart

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A Book About Growing in Love

The Song of Songs is primarily about Solomon and the bride he took — a picture of the Lord and His love for His earthly people Israel, with rich application to our own relationship with the Lord Jesus as His heavenly bride. But whatever the level of interpretation, the book traces a single arc: growth in love. The Lord's love does not need to grow. His love toward us does not ebb or flow; it is constant, unchanging, inexhaustible. It is our love that ebbs and flows, that needs to grow, that can be distracted and dimmed and then — by His grace — recovered and deepened.

In chapter 1 she is rejoicing in His kisses, overwhelmed by the sweetness of His love for her. Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth, for thy love is better than wine. She has been brought into His chambers. But by chapter 2 she has slipped back — not dramatically, not through some great failure, but quietly, imperceptibly, as it so often happens. She is not where she was. And the Lord, always seeking her, calls her again.

The Dove in the Cleft of the Rock — Security and Access

Song of Songs 2:14 opens with an address of singular tenderness: O my dove that art in the clefts of the rock, in the secret places of the stairs. She is addressed as a dove — a clean bird, timid and defenseless, but clean. Noah's dove found no clean place to rest on the flooded earth and returned to the ark. The dove does not settle where there is no cleanness. To be addressed as His dove is to be identified

as one who belongs to Him, who has the character of that clean and gentle bird.

She is in the clefts of the rock. The rock is Christ — that rock from which Israel drank in the wilderness, of which Paul says, that rock was Christ. The cleft of the rock is where Moses was placed when God's glory passed by, so that he could see it and live. To be in the cleft of the rock is to be in a place of absolute security, hidden in Christ — a picture as near to eternal security as the Old Testament provides. And from the cleft, the soul looks out and sees His glory. It is a place of safety and of vision at once.

The secret places of the stairs speaks of access. Stairs are what give entrance to what is above. Under the old covenant the high priest went once a year into the holiest place, and even then with great care and only by blood. Esther came into the presence of the king not knowing whether she would be received. But we have access at all times, in all circumstances, by the blood of Jesus. The Lord here is not keeping her at a distance — He is inviting her to use that access. Let me see thy countenance. Let me hear thy voice. He wants to see her. He wants to hear from her.

O my dove that art in the clefts of the rock, in the secret places of the stairs, let me see thy countenance, let me hear thy voice, for sweet is thy voice, and thy countenance is comely. — Song of Songs 2:14

The Little Foxes — What Spoils the Fruit

Verse 15 introduces a detail that might seem to interrupt the tenderness of what precedes it: Take us the foxes, the little foxes that spoil the vines, for our vines have tender grapes. Why little foxes? Because it is not the great disasters that most often rob the soul of fruitfulness. It is the small things — the small occupations, the small distractions, the small compromises, the small anxieties — that get in and do their damage quietly while the soul is not looking.

Foxes are known for getting into vineyards and eating the young fruit before it can ripen. They are not large enough to be immediately threatening; they look almost harmless. But the fruit is gone. The tender grapes — the things the bridegroom looks for in the soul He loves — are spoiled by these small intruders before anyone notices.

Two details in this verse deserve attention. First, the Lord says take us the foxes — not take you. He does not stand apart and give the instruction from a distance. He is there with her. It is a shared task. If there is something that has gotten in to draw us away from Him even slightly, He is present with us to deal with it. It is not something we have to do alone or in our own strength. Second, He says our vines have tender grapes — not your vines. He associates Himself with her, with her fruitfulness, with her vines. What spoils her fruit is not merely her loss. It is a matter to Him.

My Beloved Is Mine and I Am His — and Where He Feeds

The soul's declaration in verse 16 is sweet: My beloved is mine, and I am His. He feedeth His flock among the lilies. She knows where He is. He is not absent or distant or hard to find. He is with His flock, among the lilies — that is, in the place of holiness and purity, among His people, feeding them. He had told her earlier to go there, to be where He feeds the flock. She knows where that is.

The book traces her growth, and at this point she is still primarily occupied with what He is to her and what she is to Him. My beloved is mine — that is her first thought, and it is a true and precious thought. But as the book progresses she will grow to where it is all about Him: I am my beloved's. The object shifts. The soul that has truly grown in love is occupied not with its own joy in the beloved but with the beloved's joy in it. That is the maturity the bridegroom is looking for.

He says to her: until the daybreak and the shadows flee away, turn like a roe or a young hart upon the mountains of ravines. He would have her leaping over the

craggy places, not stopped by them, moving forward in the enjoyment of His love and the hope of His coming, until that day when the shadows are all gone and she sees Him face to face.

Seeking on the Bed and in the Broad Ways — Where He Is Not Found

Chapter 3 opens with a failure: By night on my bed I sought him whom my soul loveth. I sought him but I found him not. She had slipped back to ease. The world in which we live is structured around ease — comfort, entertainment, the path of least resistance. And her soul had drifted there. She was looking for the Lord from her bed. But He is not found in the place of ease. He had told her to go; she was resting.

So she decides to go out: I will rise now and go about the city and the streets and in the broad ways I will seek him. But the broad ways are no better than the bed. The broad way in Matthew's Gospel is the way that leads to destruction; it is where the world goes. The Lord is not found there either. The soul that turns to the world for what only He can give comes back empty — I sought him but I found him not.

The watchmen found her. The Lord has His watchmen — those who watch for the souls of others, who are alert to the condition of the flock. They found her, but it does not say they told her where He was. Perhaps the very encounter was the turning point — the moment of being seen and known prompted her to change direction. It was but a little that she passed from them, and she found Him. He was close all along. She had her back to Him.

It was but a little that I passed from them, but I found him whom my soul loveth. I held him and would not let him go. — Song of Songs 3:4

She found Him and would not let Him go — an echo of Jacob at Peniel, who wrestled until the Lord blessed him and would not release Him until He did. She

had grown. She was not going to lose Him again by ease or by the world. She brought Him back — not yet to His house, but to her mother's house, to the place of her conception, the place where she first came to know Him. The point of departure is always the point of return. Sometimes when we have wandered, the way back is not directly forward but back — back to where we first loved Him, back to what we first understood, back to the simplicity of first faith.

David and the Ark — A Right Intention, the Wrong Method

Second Samuel 6 records an episode that seems, on the surface, like a devotional act gone wrong. David gathers thirty thousand chosen men of Israel to bring the ark of God up to Jerusalem. He describes it in the most reverent terms: the ark of God which is called by the name of Jehovah of hosts who sitteth between the cherubim. His intention is clearly right. He is honoring the ark and the God who dwells between the cherubim.

But the ark is placed on a new cart. Uzzah and Ahio, the sons of Abinadab, drive it. When the oxen stumble, Uzzah reaches out to steady the ark — and God smites him for his error, and he dies beside the ark of God. David is indignant and then afraid. His project is halted. He asks: how shall the ark of Jehovah come to me?

The law of Moses was explicit about how the ark was to be transported. The Levites were to carry it on their shoulders, using the rings and poles God had appointed. No one was to touch it. These instructions were not hidden or obscure; they were part of the law that every king of Israel was required to copy out in a book and read all the days of his life, according to Deuteronomy 17:18. Had David done that, he would have known how the ark was to be carried, and none of this would have occurred.

It is possible to have a right thought about God's will — and to execute it in entirely the wrong way. David's intention was right. His method was his own. He

was a man of military logistics; he knew how to move large objects efficiently; he applied that knowledge to the ark. And what looked like a sensible solution turned out to be a fatal one, because it was not God's solution. The Lord is not only interested in what we do but in how we do it. Actions are weighed.

None Ought to Carry the Ark But the Levites — Hid in the Heart

First Chronicles 15 shows a completely transformed David. Verse 2 reads simply: None ought to carry the ark of God but the Levites, for them hath Jehovah chosen to carry the ark of God and to serve Him for ever. There is no logistics analysis. No committee. No new cart. Just the plain word of God, stated and obeyed.

What made the difference? Psalm 119 shows us. Thy word have I hid in my heart that I might not sin against thee. I will meditate upon thy precepts and have respect unto thy paths. I delight myself in thy statutes. This is the David of 1 Chronicles — the David who has hidden the word in his heart, who meditates on it, who delights in it, who has respect for its paths rather than substituting his own. When the question about the ark arose again, the answer was already in him. He did not need to improvise because he already knew.

This is not the accumulation of knowledge for the sake of teaching others. The bride in the Song of Songs had a heart problem; David in 2 Samuel had a heart problem. Both of them wanted to do things their own way and apply their own wisdom to matters that required God's mind. The remedy in both cases is the same: hiding the Word in the heart, meditating on it, delighting in it, so that when the moment comes the soul already knows the path.

Thy word have I hid in my heart that I might not sin against thee... I will meditate upon thy precepts and have respect unto thy paths. — Psalm 119:11, 15

First John 3:3 gives us the New Testament expression of the same truth: everyone that has this hope in him purifies himself, even as he is pure. The hope of His coming — the daybreak that the bride is waiting for, the shadows that will finally flee away — purifies. And sin, John tells us, is lawlessness: it is acting without taking God's will into account. It may be a right purpose carried out the wrong way. It may be seeking Him in the place of ease rather than where He feeds His flock. Whatever form it takes, the remedy is the same — the Word hid in the heart, the mind renewed, the feet washed, the little foxes caught before they spoil the tender grapes.

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