

Lesson 12 18 January, 2014

The Covenant of Love Neglected

Lesson Scope: [Song of Solomon 2; 3; 5:1-6:3](#)

Lesson Focus

The previous lesson focused on the deep love and committed relationship growing between the Shulamite bride and King Solomon, the bridegroom. The bride considered herself unworthy of his love and responded with undivided attention. Nothing, it seemed, could weaken or destroy the rapturous experience of love that totally entwined her heart. But unfortunately, even the strongest relationship can be broken due to human failure. The bride found herself drifting away from the deep devotion she had for her bridegroom. She became disillusioned by passive self-interest and actually ignored the voice of her bridegroom in favor of personal convenience. The beautiful relationship eventually ceased for a time.

Today, individuals and churches face the same temptation to grow indifferent and careless in their spiritual ardor for Christ. This lesson should stir us to a jealous watchfulness of our own affections so that we do not become guilty of disappointing our Bridegroom. Indifference is defined as a "lack of interest or attention; not caring." Indifference can be a blight to all areas of life. Indifference in human relationships as portrayed in Song of Solomon can damage the bonds of love. This lesson focuses on the dangers of spiritual indifference, which is marked by a casual interest or apathy toward all spiritual things.

The danger of spiritual indifference is real to all who have a relationship with Christ. Our hearts may be drawn to worldliness or become preoccupied with self and the cares of this life. We may become complacent in the ease and satisfaction of our affluent lifestyle. All these things have a way of drawing our attention away from Christ. Indifference is one of the tools Satan uses to trap the Christian. Challenge yourself and others to focus on a deep relationship with Christ and to be inspired to always give Him first place.

The Christian must cultivate his commitment of love to Jesus Christ. Only through constant communion with Him can the believer overcome

the natural tendency to lapse into spiritual lethargy.

Lesson Aim: To portray truths related to spiritual indifference.

Theme Verses: [Revelation 2:4-5](#). Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent.

Lesson Text

"Foxes, That Spoil the Vines"

[Song of Songs 2:10](#) My beloved spake, and said unto me, Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away.

[Song of Songs 2:15-17](#) ¹⁵Take us the foxes, the little foxes, that spoil the vines: for our vines *have* tender grapes. ¹⁶My beloved *is* mine, and I *am* his: he feedeth among the lilies. ¹⁷Until the day break, and the shadows flee away, turn, my beloved, and be thou like a roe or a young hart upon the mountains of Bether.

[Song of Songs 3:1-4](#) ¹By night on my bed I sought him whom my soul loveth: I sought him, but I found him not. ²I will rise now, and go about the city in the streets, and in the broad ways I will seek him whom my soul loveth: I sought him, but I found him not. ³The watchmen that go about the city found me: *to whom I said*, Saw ye him whom my soul loveth? ⁴*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, until I had brought him into my mother's house, and into the chamber of her that conceived me.

"My Beloved Had Withdrawn"

[Song of Songs 5:1-9](#) ¹I am come into my garden, my sister, *my* spouse: I have gathered my myrrh with my spice; I have eaten my honeycomb with my honey; I have drunk my wine with my milk: eat, O friends; drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved. ²I sleep, but my heart waketh: *it is* the voice of my beloved that knocketh, *saying*, Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my undefiled: for my head is filled with dew, *and* my locks with the drops of the night. ³I have put off my coat; how

shall I put it on? I have washed my feet; how shall I defile them? ⁴ My beloved put in his hand by the hole *of the door*, and my bowels were moved for him. ⁵ I rose up to open to my beloved; and my hands dropped *with myrrh*, and my fingers *with sweet smelling myrrh*, upon the handles of the lock. ⁶ I opened to my beloved; but my beloved had withdrawn himself, *and* was gone: my soul failed when he spake: I sought him, but I could not find him; I called him, but he gave me no answer. ⁷ The watchmen that went about the city found me, they smote me, they wounded me; the keepers of the walls took away my veil from me. ⁸ I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, if ye find my beloved, that ye tell him, that I *am* sick of love. ⁹ What *is* thy beloved more than *another* beloved, O thou fairest among women? what *is* thy beloved more than *another* beloved, that thou dost so charge us?

"My Beloved Is Mine"

Song of Songs 5:10 My beloved *is* white and ruddy, the chiefest among ten thousand.

Song of Songs 6:1-3 ¹ Whither is thy beloved gone, O thou fairest among women? whither is thy beloved turned aside? that we may seek him with thee. ² My beloved is gone down into his garden, to the beds of spices, to feed in the gardens, and to gather lilies. ³ I *am* my beloved's, and my beloved *is* mine: he feedeth among the lilies.

Questions for Study

"Foxes, That Spoil the Vines"

1. What was the bride's response to the bridegroom's call in Song 2:10?
2. What vines and tender grapes need protection in our relationship with Christ?
3. What are some of the little foxes that can destroy our relationship with Christ?

"My Beloved Had Withdrawn"

4. What attitude or condition is evident in the reply of the bride in Song 5:3?
5. How might some of the marks of indifference displayed by the bride manifest themselves in our relationship with Christ?
6. Why does Christ sometimes seem unresponsive to the indifferent when they do seek Him (Song 5:6)?

"My Beloved Is Mine"

7. List some steps we must take to curb indifference in our lives.
8. What are some evidences of a restored relationship?

Analyzing the Passage

The bride's response to her beloved in Song 2:17 is one of the first indications of her passiveness. She seemingly dismissed his attention with the thought, "Not now, but a little later I will enjoy his presence."

The "little foxes" (Song 2:15) could well have been jackal cubs that would come out to the vineyard to prey on varmints or insects. In their quest for food, they would often dig into the soft soil and expose the roots of the newly planted vines to the air and so destroy the seedlings. As metaphorically used by the bride, it refers to protecting her new-found relationship from anything that would hinder the prospects of love.

Twice in this lesson the bride found herself separated from her beloved (Song 3:1-4; 5:2-9). The bride, when she discovered this separation, made every effort to be reunited with her bridegroom despite misunderstanding and mistreatment.

Myrrh is a fragrant ointment that, it is thought, a man would leave on the door lock when he sought to visit his betrothed and found her absent. In this lesson, it was never the bridegroom who failed his bride; he was always faithful in his love for her.

Principles and Applications

"Foxes, That Spoil the Vines"

1. Prompt obedience to the voice of the Master and an exclusive relationship with Him will help to avoid indifference (Song 2:10). When Jesus calls us outwardly by His Word or inwardly by His Spirit, our sensitivity to His voice will strongly indicate where our relationship with Christ stands. When He calls us to rise up out of sin or despondency, or to come away from worldliness and the snares of lust and pride, an immediate response will keep the flame of love for our Saviour burning brightly and will cause the things of this world to become dim.
2. Diligence in dealing with small matters will help us remain spiritually strong (Song 2:15). It is what we feed in our lives that will grow. Allowing indifference to settle in our hearts can finally grow into unbe-

lief. Wrong attitudes can grow into hatred and bitterness. Seeking the approval of men will grow into pride and worldliness. Our diligence in discerning these human tendencies will be greatly enhanced by feeding daily on the Bread of Life. May God help us guard our souls against the little things that can weaken us spiritually and cause us eventually to neglect our relationship with Christ.

3. Indifference is evidenced by failing to be constant in one's relationship with the Lord (Song 2:17). An indifferent attitude toward spiritual things will reveal itself by whom or what we put first in our lives. Our Christian life is not about doing what is most convenient to us, but about what God wants us to do. There is never a time for pause in our Christian experience. How willing are we to participate in worship services, or to be available to serve in church functions or schoolwork? How much time do we set aside from our schedules to spend time with God each day? These aptly indicate whether we fervently aspire to serve Christ and His church or whether we prefer to follow the dictates of self and ease.

4. Spurning Christ's call will leave us in darkness and despair (Song 3:1-4).

Christ will also sometimes withdraw Himself from those who are indifferent. This allows them to experience the pain and despair that comes when they discover His absence. But without Him life is fruitless and frightening.

"My Beloved Had Withdrawn"

5. Preoccupation with self is a sign of spiritual indifference (Song 5:2-3).

Jesus clearly taught that we need to love God with all our heart, soul, and mind, and to love others as ourselves to be His disciples (see Matthew 22:37-39). When we become too focused on ourselves, our businesses, or our social life, our devotion to Christ will be hindered.

6. Indifference is always caused by man's failure, never by Christ's (Song 5:4, 6). No one can ever blame Christ if the relationship is weakened or destroyed. The Scriptures promise us Christ's presence if we are fully surrendered to Him. When our old nature and the world around us begin to dominate our hearts, then Christ will sadly withdraw because He cannot tolerate sin and worldliness.

7. The path of indifference becomes increasingly difficult and danger-

ous (Song 5:7). Initially, the way of indifference may not seem so dangerous; but as a person drifts away from Christ, he becomes easy prey for Satan. The way of truth will become more obscure, and the confusing voices of the world and of false religion may hamper the return to truth. Eventually, indifference can lead to deception and unbelief, plunging such persons into depths of sin and darkness they never thought possible.

8. Spiritual indifference exerts a negative influence upon those who observe (Song 5:8-9). When new Christians notice indifference in the lives of older, more "mature" Christians, it can be a real stumbling block to their spiritual progress. Indifference also taints the testimony of the church to the world around us. God will hold us accountable if we are guilty of turning others away from truth by our indifference.

"My Beloved Is Mine"

9. A renewed vision of Christ is essential in finding the remedy for indifference (Song 5:10). When we truly seek the Bridegroom and consider the richness of His character, we cannot help being inspired to a greater zeal to please Him. A deeper comprehension and frequent discussion of His work for us is an excellent antidote to indifference.

10. Christ is willing and able to restore fellowship when man is ready to return to Him (Song 6:1-3). Because of His mercy to all who truly seek Him, Christ will not keep them groping in darkness, but will lead them into His marvelous light. When one repents of his sinful action and indifference, Christ will forgive and restore the relationship again.

Answers to Questions

1. What was the bride's response to the bridegroom's call in Song 2:10? Her answer in verse 17 suggests that she wanted her beloved to leave her alone for now, as if she is selfishly desiring a pause in her relationship with him.

2. What vines and tender grapes need protection in our relationship with Christ?

Our faith and belief in God, our assurance of salvation, the presence of the fruit of the Spirit, our prayer life, our work of service for Christ, and our relationship with others in the body of Christ are some vines and tender branches that we need to protect from the little foxes.

3. What are some of the little foxes that can destroy our relationship with Christ?

Sin is the most damaging fox that can destroy our relationship. Doubt and mistrust can hinder the growth of the fruit. Indifference can blind us to our need for a close relationship with Christ. Jealousy, anger, pride, rebellion against authority, bad attitudes, worldliness, and materialism are other little foxes we need to guard against.

4. What attitude or condition is evident in the reply of the bride in 5:3?

She was unwilling to be inconvenienced for the sake of her beloved. Self-satisfaction, self-indulgence, and indifference mark her response. She was drifting into sleep and did not wish to be disturbed.

5. How might some of the marks of indifference displayed by the bride manifest themselves in our relationship with Christ?

Indifference often displays itself in our personal walk with God, such as neglecting daily meditation on the Word, not spending time with God in prayer, or allowing our minds to drift in worship services. Being preoccupied with business pursuits, supporting an extravagant lifestyle, spending an inordinate amount of time with a hobby, or finding it easy to excuse ourselves from service in the church may also indicate that indifference has a grip on our hearts.

6. Why does Christ sometimes seem unresponsive to the indifferent when they do seek Him (Song 5:6)?

Christ will not hide Himself from the true, diligent seeker. But if the indifferent seek Christ indifferently, He will not reveal Himself to them. The heartache and despair that may come when an indifferent person is suddenly aware of his condition may serve to increase his desire to find Christ again and to diligently maintain the relationship once it is restored.

7. List some steps we must take to curb indifference in our lives. A healthy devotional life, searching our hearts and dealing with any evidences of slackness in our spiritual life, is important for maintaining a close walk with Christ. Putting Christ before all other pursuits in life and giving God the glory and praise for all our successes will keep self from being promoted and keep our spiritual vision clear. Freely telling others what Christ has done for us will help inspire love in our hearts for our Beloved.

8. What are some evidences of a restored relationship?

A renewed zeal in service for Christ, a ready answer to those who ask of the hope within us (see 1 Peter 3:15), assurance of God's approval of our lives, an intense desire for His presence, and a diligence not to allow anything to come between Christ and us are some evidences of a restored relationship.

Important Teachings

1. Prompt obedience to the voice of the Master and an exclusive relationship with Him helps us to avoid indifference (Song 2:10).
2. Diligence in dealing with small matters helps us to remain spiritually strong (Song 2:15).
3. Indifference is evidenced by failing to be constant in one's relationship with the Lord (Song 2:17).
4. Spurning Christ's call will leave us in darkness and despair (Song 3:1-4).
5. Preoccupation with self is a sign of spiritual indifference (Song 5:2-3).
6. Indifference is always caused by man's failure, never by Christ's (Song 5:4, 6).
7. The path of indifference becomes increasingly difficult and dangerous (5:7).
8. Spiritual indifference exerts a negative influence upon those who observe (Song 5:8-9).
9. A renewed vision of Christ is essential in finding the remedy for indifference (Song 5:10).
10. Christ is willing and able to restore fellowship when man is ready to return to Him (Song 6:1-3).

Summarizing the Lesson

As we consider what a beautiful relationship we can have with Christ and also recognize how damaging indifference can be to that relationship, we should search our hearts diligently for any signs of indifference and weed them out. Christ has given His very life to redeem us unto Himself. Why would we not want to give our lives back to Him who first loved us? May our love for our Bridegroom be strengthened as we consider His beauty and all He has done for us. All we have is from God, and He deserves the recognition for it.

Research Guide

1. Study Israel's history, noting especially God's merciful response to their frequent cycles of spiritual decline and repentance.
2. Review New Testament Scriptures that call us to spiritual alertness and vitality. You might start with Colossians 3.