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SONG OF SOLOMON

A 6-Week Group Bible Study

By Greg and Kayla Gibson

WEEK 1 OF 6 • GENERAL / MIXED GROUP EDITION

Love Better Than Wine — Song of Solomon 1:1–2:7

Scripture Scope: Song of Solomon 1:1–2:7 (ESV) • Session Length: 75–90 Minutes

PARTICIPANT STUDY EDITION

Synchronized Section-by-Section with the Leader Guide Edition · Includes Group Reflection Workspace

Song of Solomon — 6-Week Group Bible Study (Participant Study Edition)

Week 1: Love Better Than Wine (Song of Solomon 1:1–2:7)

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- **The title:** "The Song of Songs, which is Solomon's" (1:1). "Song of Songs" is a Hebrew way of saying "the best of songs," in the same pattern as "holy of holies." The ESV names the book Song of Solomon.
- **The voices:** A woman (the first and leading voice), a man, and a poetic chorus or audience called the daughters of Jerusalem (not necessarily identifiable historical attendants in every scene). The ESV supplies speaker labels (She, He, Others) as interpretive editorial aids; the Hebrew text does not name the speakers.
- **Its form:** A carefully arranged collection or unified sequence of love poems; interpreters differ over its precise compositional history and narrative continuity. Scenes of delight, waiting, searching, praise, and refrain are woven into one celebration of covenant love.
- **The structure:**
  - Opening delight and the first charge (1:1–2:7).
  - The beloved comes, and a first search in the night (2:8–3:5).
  - A royal procession and the garden (3:6–5:1).
  - A second search and reunion (5:2–6:3).
  - Praise, longing, and the refrain again (6:4–8:4).
  - Love as strong as death, and the close (8:5–14).
- **Why it matters:** Covenant love is a gift from God to be cherished, not seized. The Song celebrates delight, waiting, seeking, and a love that death itself cannot drown. Later Scripture teaches the church to hear in it the love of the Bridegroom for his people, without turning the poem into a puzzle or forgetting the human love it sings.

How This 6-Week Study Works

You may notice this study is shorter than our usual eight weeks. Even though we are 8weekbiblestudy.com, stretching Song of Solomon to eight weeks would have left it thin on content, and we never want to trade quality for quantity.

Designed for weekly small groups, mini-churches, and community gatherings (75–90 minutes per session) rather than daily homework checklists, this is a 6-week study. The Song has 117 verses arranged in tight poetic units, so six weeks follow the poem's own turns without padding. Each week invites you to listen to the Song together through six repeatable sections:

- **Section X.1 — Opening:** Sets the scene, the Week at a Glance, Head, Heart, and Hands objectives, the Opening Frame, and the Opening Entry Question.
- **Section X.2 — Historical & Literary Context:** Places the week's verses inside the shape of the Song and the ancient Near Eastern world.
- **Section X.3 — Movement 1:** The week's first guided passage: Guided Scripture Reading, Anchor Verses, Teaching Narrative, and Group Discussion Questions.
- **Section X.4 — Movement 2:** The week's second guided passage, following the same flow.
- **Section X.5 — Canonical Horizon:** Traces how the passage echoes across Scripture and finds its fulfillment in Jesus Christ.

- **Section X.6 — Application, Looking Ahead, and Closing Prayer:** Moves the week's study into everyday life, previews next week, and closes in prayer.

Key anchor verses are printed in each section for quick reference. Longer focal passages are read aloud together from the ESV. Some lines of this love poem are summarized rather than read aloud, out of respect for the poem and for everyone in the room. The Song celebrates mutual desire within covenant love. It must never be used to pressure dating, marriage, sex, pregnancy, reconciliation, or disclosure of intimate experiences. Single, widowed, divorced, celibate, infertile, LGBTQ-identifying, trauma-affected, and unhappily married participants may hear this book from different life situations. Do not imply that marriage is the measure of spiritual maturity or human completeness. Sharing personal reflections is always optional, and any participant may pass without explanation.

Choosing a Bible Translation: Top 5 Translations Compared

Every English Bible translation falls along a spectrum between two primary approaches: word-for-word translation (formal equivalence, which prioritizes literal accuracy to the original phrasing and sentence structure) and thought-for-thought translation (dynamic equivalence, which prioritizes immediate modern readability by translating idioms and ideas into natural contemporary expressions). Here is how five widely used English translations compare:

- **ESV (English Standard Version) — Word-for-Word**
  - Pros: Follows the wording and sentence structure of the original Hebrew and Greek closely while using modern English; well suited to close study.
  - Cons: Because it tracks the original sentence structure, some phrasing can feel more formal than everyday speech.
- **NIV (New International Version) — Balanced (Between Word-for-Word and Thought-for-Thought)**
  - Pros: Widely read; balances accuracy to the original languages with natural, everyday readability.
  - Cons: Because some idioms are rendered as modern expressions, a few literal wordplays or technical terms can be less visible.
- **NLT (New Living Translation) — Thought-for-Thought**
  - Pros: Warm and conversational; reads smoothly aloud and helps readers follow the big picture of long passages.
  - Cons: Because it prioritizes meaning over literal phrasing, it can be harder to use for close word study.
- **CSB (Christian Standard Bible) — Optimal Equivalence (Balanced)**
  - Pros: Stays close to the original words where possible while smoothing awkward phrasing into natural modern English.
  - Cons: Because it is a newer translation, some well-known verses may sound different from the wording many readers remember.
- **KJV / NKJV (King James Version & New King James Version) — Traditional Word-for-Word**
  - Pros: Historic cadence that shaped English literature and church history; the NKJV updates archaic pronouns ("thee/thou") while keeping the classic rhythm.
  - Cons: Often reads like older English poetry, with complex sentences and archaic or formal vocabulary that can be harder for modern readers to follow.

This study quotes the ESV.

Greg & Kayla's Recommended Study Bibles

Having a trusted study Bible on hand is one of the best ways to go deeper as you read through Song of Solomon:

- **Greg's Favorite Study Bible:** The MacArthur Study Bible (ESV), which contains extensive explanatory notes beneath almost every verse, ideal for detailed study.

- **Kayla's Favorite Study Bible:** The ESV Study Bible, containing over 20,000 study notes, articles, and explanations.

The 6-Week Song of Solomon Study at a Glance

Week	Title & Passage	Movement 1 / Movement 2	Canonical Horizon
1	**Love Better Than Wine** (1:1–2:7)	The Song Begins (1:1–17) / The Banner and the Charge (2:1–7)	Human covenant love and the Bridegroom theme in Scripture; a people who wait and do not seize
2	**Until the Day Breathes** (2:8–3:5)	The Voice of My Beloved (2:8–17) / I Sought Him (3:1–5)	The voice of the Beloved who comes; seeking and finding in the night
3	**The Procession and the Garden** (3:6–5:1)	Who Is This Coming Up? (3:6–11) / You Are Beautiful, My Love (4:1–5:1)	The King who comes for his bride; the garden and the joy of the wedding
4	**I Sought Him, but Found Him Not** (5:2–6:3)	The Second Search (5:2–8) / What Is Your Beloved? (5:9–6:3)	A people who seek and describe their Beloved; he is not finally lost
5	**I Am My Beloved's** (6:4–8:4)	Terrible as an Army with Banners (6:4–13) / Longing and the Charge Again (7:1–8:4)	Mutual belonging in Christ
6	**Love Is Strong as Death** (8:5–14)	Set Me as a Seal (8:5–7) / The Little Sister and the Vineyard (8:8–14)	Love stronger than death; the marriage supper of the Lamb

WEEK 1 OF 6

WEEK 1 SESSION GUIDE · SONG OF SOLOMON 1:1–2:7

Week 1: Love Better Than Wine

Scripture Scope: Song of Solomon 1:1–2:7 (ESV) • Focal Passages: Song of Solomon 1:1–8; 1:15–16; 2:1–4; 2:7 • Session Length: 75–90 Minutes

Section 1.1

Opening: Love Better Than Wine (Song of Solomon 1:1–2:7)

Opening

The Song opens with a superlative title: "The Song of Songs, which is Solomon's." Then, before any man speaks, a woman sings. She longs for her beloved, says his love is better than wine, and asks him to draw her after him. She speaks honestly to the daughters of Jerusalem about her sun-darkened skin and the vineyard she has not kept, and asks where her beloved pastures his flock.

The two praise each other. She calls herself a rose of Sharon and a lily of the valleys; he says she is a lily among brambles. He brings her to the banqueting house, and his banner over her is love. The unit closes with a charge that will echo through the whole book: do not stir up or awaken love until it pleases.

Week 1 At a Glance

Scripture Scope	Song of Solomon 1:1–2:7 (the title, the woman's opening delight, the vineyard and the daughters of Jerusalem, mutual praise, the banqueting house and the banner, and the first charge not to awaken love early)
Focal Passages	Song of Solomon 1:1–8; 1:15–16; 2:1–4; 2:7
Literary & Structural Anchor	The poem begins in the woman's voice. Love and the beloved's name are compared to wine and fragrance: public joy, not only private feeling. The vineyard is already a picture of her own life. The charge of 2:7 closes the unit and will return twice (3:5; 8:4).
Big Idea	Covenant love is a delight and a gift from God, and it is not to be seized before its time.

Week 1 Learning Objectives (Head, Heart, Hands)

HEAD	**Know the Song:** Learn the Song's title, voices, and shape, and the meaning of the banner and the charge in 1:1–2:7.
HEART	**Rest Under His Banner:** See that Christ the Bridegroom loves his people with a love better than wine, and that his banner over us is love.
HANDS	**Honor Love's Timing:** Take one step to honor God's gift of love with patience, gratitude, and respect for others.

Opening Frame: A Song of Songs

Ecclesiastes ended by telling us to remember our Creator and to receive life with those we love as a gift from God in our brief days. It closed by previewing two lines from this book: "My beloved is mine, and I am his" (Song of Solomon 2:16) and "love is strong as death" (Song of Solomon 8:6). Now the series turns from wisdom's honest look at life under the sun to wisdom's song of delight. The Song of Solomon is one unified love poem, with a woman, a man, and a chorus of friends, celebrating covenant love as God's good gift. This is a 6–week study, and we will honor this poem with care and good taste. Whether you are married, single, widowed, or divorced, you belong in this study. The question for this week: what does it mean that God gave us a song about love, and that his love for us is better than wine? Before we read together, take a moment to share with the group:

Opening Entry Question (Icebreaker)

1.1 Q1 (Opening Entry Question): What is a song, poem, or hymn about love that has stayed with you over the years, and why?

Section 1.2

Historical & Literary Context: A Song of Songs (Song of Solomon 1:1–2:7)

Entering the World of the Song of Songs

1. Historical Background

In 1:1, the Hebrew phrase can mean "which is Solomon's," "concerning Solomon," or "associated with Solomon," so interpreters hold different views on direct Solomonic authorship. The title links the Song to Solomon, famed for wisdom and songs (1 Kings 4:32). The poem's "I" is first of all the woman who speaks, and Solomon appears as a royal figure in the poem without every line needing to describe a court scene.

2. Cultural Setting

Other ancient Near Eastern cultures, especially Egypt, also wrote love songs about gardens, gazelles, perfume, and the praise of a beloved. Israel's Song uses that recognized language of love poetry and places it in Scripture, under the fear of the LORD, without embarrassment and without any link to the worship of fertility gods.

3. Literary Structure of Song of Solomon 1:1–2:7

- **Title** (1:1)
- **A love better than wine** (1:2–4)
- **Dark and lovely, and the vineyard** (1:5–8)
- **Mutual praise** (1:9–17)
- **A rose and a banner** (2:1–6)
- **The first charge** (2:7)

4. Key Themes

The woman's voice; love compared to wine and fragrance; the vineyard as a person's life; belonging under a banner; the charge to wait for love's time.

5. Theological Considerations

Honor the Song first as a poem of embodied human covenant love between a man and a woman, created good by God (Genesis 2:23–25). Jewish allegorical and Christian ecclesial readings have been historically influential, yet the poem first celebrates embodied human love. Then, in the Canonical Horizon, hear the Bridegroom and his people without erasing the human poem or turning every image into a code.

6. Relevant Scholarly Insights

The ESV supplies speaker labels as interpretive aids; the Hebrew text does not name the speakers. Do not read the book as a chronological courtship-to-wedding narrative: the poem moves by scenes, refrains, memories, dreams, and repeated images, so the order of events need not be pressed.

Group Discussion Questions (Section 1.2)

> **1.2 Q1:** The title calls this "The Song of Songs" (1:1), the best of songs. Why do you think God included a love song in the Bible?

1.2 Q2: The poem begins with the woman's voice, not the man's. What difference does it make that she speaks first and most often?

1.2 Q3: Why do you think many Christians feel awkward reading this book, and what might we miss if we skip it?

Section 1.3

Movement 1: The Song Begins (Song of Solomon 1:1–17)

Guided Scripture Reading

Read aloud in this order, with brief connecting summaries between readings:

- **Reader 1: Song of Solomon 1:1** (focal passage) — The title: the Song of Songs, which is Solomon's.
- **Summary of Song of Solomon 1:2–3** — The woman longs for her beloved's affection, says his love is better than wine, and says his very name is like fragrant oil poured out, so that the young women love him.
- **Reader 2: Song of Solomon 1:4–8** (focal passage) — She asks him to draw her after him; the king has brought her into his chambers, and others rejoice in his love. She tells the daughters of Jerusalem that she is very dark but lovely, darkened by the sun because her brothers made her keep the vineyards while her own vineyard went untended. She asks where he pastures his flock at noon, and the reply tells her to follow the tracks of the flock.
- **Summary of Song of Solomon 1:9–14** — He compares her to a prized mare among Pharaoh's chariots and promises ornaments of gold; she compares him to sweet fragrance and to blossoms from the vineyards of En-gedi.
- **Reader 3: Song of Solomon 1:15–17** (focal passage) — He says she is beautiful and her eyes are doves; she answers that he is beautiful and delightful, and describes their green and cedar-shaded place of gladness.

Anchor Verses (ESV)

Song of

Solomon 1:1: The Song of Songs, which is Solomon's.

Song of

Solomon 1:4: Draw me after you; let us run. The king has brought me into his chambers. We will exult and rejoice in you; we will extol your love more than wine; rightly do they love you.

Song of

Solomon 1:5: I am very dark, but lovely, O daughters of Jerusalem, like the tents of Kedar, like the curtains of Solomon.

Song of

Solomon 1:7: Tell me, you whom my soul loves, where you pasture your flock, where you make it lie down at noon; for why should I be like one who veils herself beside the flocks of your companions?

Song of

Solomon 1:15: Behold, you are beautiful, my love; behold, you are beautiful; your eyes are doves.

Teaching Narrative: The Song Begins

1. The Best of Songs (Song of Solomon 1:1)

The title and how to read the book. Whether you are married, single, widowed, or divorced, this book belongs to you: it celebrates God's good gift of love, and it points to Christ, whose love is for every believer.

2. A Love Better Than Wine (Song of Solomon 1:2–4)

Told in brief, then 1:4 read. Joy, longing, and gladness shared with others.

3. Dark and Lovely (Song of Solomon 1:5–6)

The woman's dignity and her untended vineyard.

4. Where Do You Pasture? (Song of Solomon 1:7–8)

Seeking the beloved openly, not in hiding.

5. Mutual Praise (Song of Solomon 1:9–17)

Retold briefly, with 1:15 read. Each delights in the other.

Group Discussion Questions (Section 1.3)

1.3 Q1: The woman says, "we will extol your love more than wine" (1:4). What does it mean to say love is better than one of life's richest pleasures?

1.3 Q2: She says, "I am very dark, but lovely" (1:5). How does she hold both honesty and dignity, and why does that matter for how we see ourselves?

1.3 Q3: She admits, "my own vineyard I have not kept" (1:6). What might it look like for a busy or overlooked person to have neglected the care of their own life?

1.3 Q4: She asks, "Tell me, you whom my soul loves, where you pasture your flock" (1:7). What does her question show about seeking the one we love openly rather than in hiding?

1.3 Q5: "Behold, you are beautiful, my love" (1:15). How do honest, respectful words of praise build up a marriage, a friendship, or a church family without pressure? (Sharing is optional; anyone may pass.)

Section 1.4

Movement 2: The Banner and the Charge (Song of Solomon 2:1–7)

Guided Scripture Reading

Read aloud in this order, with brief connecting summaries between readings:

- **Reader 1: Song of Solomon 2:1–2** (focal passage) — She calls herself a rose of Sharon, a lily of the valleys; he answers that as a lily among brambles, so is his love among the young women.
- **Summary of Song of Solomon 2:3** — She says that as an apple tree stands out among the trees of the forest, so does her beloved among the young men; she sits in his shade with great delight and finds his fruit sweet.
- **Reader 2: Song of Solomon 2:4** (focal passage) — He brought her to the banqueting house, and his banner over her was love.
- **Summary of Song of Solomon 2:5–6** — She is faint with love and asks to be refreshed; she speaks of his embrace.
- **Reader 3: Song of Solomon 2:7** (focal passage) — She charges the daughters of Jerusalem not to stir up or awaken love until it pleases.

Anchor Verses (ESV)

Song of

Solomon 2:4: He brought me to the banqueting house, and his banner over me was love.

Song of

Solomon 2:7: I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, by the gazelles or the does of the field, that you not stir up or awaken love until it pleases.

Teaching Narrative: The Banner and the Charge

1. A Lily Among Brambles (Song of Solomon 2:1–2)

Humble self-description answered by honoring praise.

2. In His Shade (Song of Solomon 2:3)

Retold briefly. Rest and delight in the beloved.

3. His Banner over Me (Song of Solomon 2:4)

Public, protective belonging.

4. Faint with Love (Song of Solomon 2:5–6)

Told in brief, with restraint.

5. The First Charge (Song of Solomon 2:7)

"Do not awaken love before it is appropriate and mutual." The refrain warns against forcing love, not to produce purity-culture shame or aim a rule only at women.

Group Discussion Questions (Section 1.4)

1.4 Q1: She says, "I am a rose of Sharon, a lily of the valleys," and he replies, "As a lily among brambles, so is my love among the young women" (2:1–2). How does his answer lift up her modest words?

1.4 Q2: What does "with great delight I sat in his shadow" (2:3) show about mutual care and safety—and, with no obligation to share personal stories aloud, what marks trustworthy friendship or community?

1.4 Q3: "His banner over me was love" (2:4). A banner marked whom a person belonged to. What does it mean to live under a banner of love?

1.4 Q4: The woman charges the daughters "that you not stir up or awaken love until it pleases" (2:7). Why would love need to be guarded and waited for?

1.4 Q5: Our culture often pressures people to rush love or to treat desire lightly. How does the charge of 2:7 offer a better and kinder way?

Section 1.5

Canonical Horizon: Human Covenant Love and the Bridegroom Theme in Scripture

Tracing the Thread Across Scripture

The Song first celebrates human love. Later Scripture uses bridegroom and bride imagery for God, Christ, and the covenant people. This is canonical development, not a claim that every physical detail secretly describes Christ or the church. Turn to each passage as the connections are traced.

1. Honor the Poem First (Genesis 2:23–25; Proverbs 5:18–19)

God made man and woman and called their union good. The Song celebrates that gift without shame.

2. The Bridegroom Who Gives Himself (Ephesians 5:25–32; John 3:29)

Ephesians 5 offers a canonical development of self-giving covenant love in Christ, without erasing the Song's own human subject. John the Baptist rejoiced to hear the Bridegroom's voice.

3. Better Than Wine (John 2:1–11; John 15:9–11)

At a wedding Jesus gave the best wine last, and he invites his people to abide in his love so that their joy may be full.

4. A People Who Wait (Revelation 19:6–9; 21:2)

Revelation 19 and 21 bring the biblical marriage-supper and bride themes to their climax—not as a verse-by-verse key to Song of Solomon, but as the promise that the Bridegroom's banner over his people is love.

Anchor Verse (ESV)

> Song of
>
> **Solomon 1:4:** Draw me after you; let us run. The king has brought me into his chambers. We will exult and rejoice in you; we will extol your love more than wine; rightly do they love you.

Group Discussion Questions (Section 1.5)

1.5 Q1: Paul writes, "Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her" (Ephesians 5:25). How does Christ's love give the deepest meaning to the love the Song celebrates?

1.5 Q2: Jesus says, "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love" (John 15:9). How is Christ's love "better than wine" for every believer, married or single?

1.5 Q3: Revelation says, "Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb" (Revelation 19:9). How does that promise encourage patient hope? (Silent reflection is always welcome.)

Personal & Group Application (Head, Heart, Hands)

HEAD	The Song is a God-given love poem; its banner is love, and its first charge is to wait for love's time.
HEART	Christ the Bridegroom loves his people with a love better than wine, and he holds them under his banner.
HANDS	Faith speaks honest praise, honors the dignity of others, and refuses to rush or misuse love.

Section 1.6

Application, Looking Ahead, and Closing Prayer

Application

Take a few minutes to move this week's study into everyday life. Discuss these three questions together and write down what you want to remember:

1.6 Q1: What does it mean in Scripture to live under Christ's banner of love, and where might a believer need that assurance this week? (Personal reflection may remain private.)

1.6 Q2: Whom could you encourage this week with honest, kind words of praise?

1.6 Q3: How can our group help one another honor love's timing with patience and grace?

Looking Ahead to Next Week

Recap: In Week 1, we heard the Song's opening delight, the woman's dignity, the banner of love, and the first charge not to awaken love early.

Transition: Next week the beloved comes leaping over the hills, and the woman searches for him in the night.

Week 2 Overview — Until the Day Breathes (Song of Solomon 2:8–3:5): Movement 1, The Voice of My Beloved (2:8–17), covers spring, invitation, and mutual belonging. Movement 2, I Sought Him (3:1–5), covers a night search and the charge again. The Canonical Horizon traces the voice of the Beloved who comes, and seeking and finding.

Focal Readings to Preview

- Song of Solomon 2:8–9
- Song of Solomon 2:13–16
- Song of Solomon 3:1–5

My One Concrete Step for the Week Ahead

Write down or name aloud the specific rhythm, boundary, or conversation you want to practice before next week's gathering:

Closing Prayer

Close your time together by inviting each person to share a one-sentence takeaway or prayer request, then pray together along these lines:

> **Closing Group Prayer**
>
> God of love, you made love and called it good. Thank you that Christ's love is better than wine and that his banner over his people is love. We pray for marriages, and for the single, the widowed, the divorced, and all who long for love. We pray for anyone who has been hurt or shamed. Give us patience to honor love's timing. Thank you that no one is outside Christ's love. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.