

## VALUE ONE

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### THE HEART OF THE SONG

To go deep into the Song of Songs we need a lens to see through. We need a perspective from which to interpret what God was getting at when He authored these eight glorious chapters in the heart of Solomon. In other words, we need to set a goal of what to look for and focus on as we study. For example, we could choose to study for the purpose of figuring out the meaning of all the symbols and how the story flows together. But while it's important to understand the symbols and the basic story line there is so much more to the book than these. To gain this lens, this perspective, we must start on the rocky, yellow hills around Bethlehem, 3000 years ago.

In those days a young shepherd boy tended the sheep of his father in rain and snow, winter and summer, under the blazing sun, the shining moon

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and the myriad of stars about which he wrote so profoundly. Bethlehem was a forgotten little town then - out of the way and out of the consciousness of a troubled nation.

The job of shepherding was a menial and lonely task usually reserved for servants. Yet here was the eighth son of a wealthy citizen forgotten on the hills for months at a time. Yet it was amongst the sheep that God found him on the greatest day of his father, Jesse's, life.

1 Samuel 16 describes the reason for this day. Having rejected Israel's first King, Saul, God commanded the old prophet, Samuel, to fill his horn with oil and go to the town of Bethlehem. He was to anoint a new king from among the sons of Jesse. Down through the ages, the words of God about this task thunder with significance. "...I have provided for MYSELF a king among his sons." (1 Samuel 16:1 - emphasis added)

As the Bible tells, the elders of Bethlehem were afraid at the coming of the aged prophet. They wondered in fear at what fierce judgement Israel's last judge was coming to pronounce upon their humble town (1 Samuel 16:4). Samuel replied that he came in peace only to make a sacrifice and meet the man Jesse and his family. The ways of a prophet are mysterious the elders must have reasoned. If God had

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told him to make a sacrifice in Bethlehem and dine with this citizen, then it was blessing for the town. Accordingly, we find Samuel at Jesse's table, meeting his sons and enquiring of the Lord in his heart about the identity of God's chosen one.

Eliab, the eldest son, is the first to be introduced. Tall, dark, strong and handsome, he is a warrior. Samuel jumps ahead of God.

*"Surely the Lord's anointed...!"* he proclaims (1 Samuel 16:6).

I can imagine Eliab thrust out his chest. 'YES! I knew this day would come,' he thought. Jesse beamed with pride. And then the story took a most unexpected turn. God thundered from heaven through the old prophet's spirit. 'NO!

*"Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him."* (1 Samuel 16:7a)

'We've been down this path before Samuel. Don't you remember what happened with Saul? He was head and shoulders above the rest of his people and yet he failed completely to know, love and serve me.' (see 1 Samuel 10:23)

*"For the LORD sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart."* (1 Samuel 16:7)

Samuel is bemused. He moves to meet the next brother, Abinadab. But God has not chosen him

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either. Shammah is next. “Nope,” says Samuel. The next four brothers are not named by scripture but none of them are chosen either and now Samuel is confused.

He turns to Jesse and asks, “*Are these all the sons you have?*” (1 Samuel 16:11)

As we read this passage we can almost feel Jesse squirm. ‘Well, you know, there is another one, the youngest. Little David. But no one really takes him seriously.

The New King James translation of this passage makes it clear that they could actually see David from where they stood.

The prophet was now incredulous, “*Send and get him, for we will not sit down until he arrives.*” (1 Samuel 16:11)

When David was brought before Samuel the Lord spoke once again and this time it was the gentle, still whisper Samuel knew so well.

“*Arise, anoint him, for this is he.*” Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brothers. And the Spirit of the LORD rushed upon David from that day forward. (1 Samuel 16:12, 13)

## GOD REVEALS HIS HEART

I believe this story marks the recorded beginning of David's revelation regarding the significance of the beauty of the Lord. By 'the beauty of the Lord' I don't only mean the physical appearance of God, the overwhelming beauty coming from the throne room in heaven, the thunder and lightning flashing on the sea of glass (Revelation 4). I mean the beauty of God's heart, the beauty of His emotional make-up, the beauty of His ways and His character, the beauty of the way He thinks and feels and deals with His people (His affections towards us). When we call a person we know beautiful, most often we are not only talking about physical appearance. We're talking about their character.

In the same way, the beauty of the Lord is that which we find most attractive about Him. While God Himself is the definition of beauty, each of us individually perceive different aspects of who He is and therefore find different parts of Him beautiful. The beauty of the Lord then is not something we can take hold of and necessarily define. Rather, the beauty of the Lord includes those aspects of God which take hold of us and captivate our hearts.

Here is David, the last son of a family who lives in the back hills of the Judean countryside. Nothing

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exciting ever happens in Bethlehem. And now the Bill Johnson, president of the nation, number one famous guy in the land comes to visit. The prophet wants to dine with David's family and David is left out, forgotten in the hills doing a menial task meant for servants. Couldn't someone have been sent to tend the sheep for those few hours Samuel visited? Is it safe to conclude David's family held contempt for him?

Yet while David's family might have written him off, God knew where he was. Even while the greatest prophet the nation had ever known was admiring tall, dark and handsome, God thundered from heaven and said, 'NO. I don't see as a man sees. I evaluate very differently. If you judge Jesse's sons by anything you can see with your eyes you're going to miss what I see.' Oh the beauty of God's heart! To see the weak ones, the forgotten ones, the ones who by man's standards don't qualify. He says, 'I see you, I know you, I choose you.' Friends, this is our story. Though you may be written off by many, God evaluates you by very different criteria.

I believe this experience became the foundation of David's identity. As Samuel retold this story to David over the years (as he undoubtedly became a mentor to the young man) the truth of God's character in seeing David, knowing him and choosing

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him out of obscurity served as a powerful affirmation of what David was doing when God called him. It affirmed in him the validity in God's eyes of what he was doing and what was in his heart.

### THE MAN AFTER GOD'S OWN HEART

So, what was in David's heart? What was he doing on that fateful day Samuel visited? On this day, as on the other days he spent with the sheep, he was lost in the pursuit of knowing and loving God. He was lost in this pursuit because of the indescribable delight and pleasure he found in it. His life dream on those hills of Bethlehem had become (and continued to be for the rest of his life) this: to be filled with delight as he pursued and encountered the fiery, passion of God's heart for him. On the hills of Bethlehem, in the midst of what most would call mundane: standing with the sheep by day; singing songs to pass the long, lonely nights, God had revealed his heart. David became completely addicted to the delight of the experience. It is a question worth pondering: Are joy and delight the primary motivators of your relationship with God? Because this is what God has and intends for us.

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So how do we know David was a man consumed with pursuing the delight that comes from encountering the beauty of God? Here are some examples.

Firstly, Psalm 8:3-4 – *“When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him?”* David is on the lonely hills at night with the sheep and he is marveling at the majesty and power of God as revealed through the moon and the stars above him.

Secondly, Psalm 29:3 – *“The voice of the LORD is over the waters; the God of glory thunders, the LORD, over many waters.”* David is again on the hills with the sheep. This time he’s caught in a thunderstorm and he’s encountering the power of God in the thunder and lightning.

Further along in his life, Psalm 60:4-5 records David praying. In the midst of war with Babylon (Mesopotamia) and Syria with crisis facing the nation, David gets lost in prayer and calls himself ‘God’s beloved one’.

*“You have set up a banner for those who fear you, that they may flee to it from the bow. Selah. That your beloved ones may be delivered, give salvation by your right hand and answer us!”*

He didn’t call himself God’s servant even though he used this phrase in the Psalms at other times



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(Psalm 119:23 and 125; Psalm 116: 16; Psalm 86:16; Psalm 143:12). But here he called himself, 'God's beloved one'. I can imagine one of his friends overheard him and said, 'God's going to deliver who?' And David would have opened his eyes and said, 'Oh...oh yeah...people don't talk like this do they?' This was an entirely new understanding for people then – that God actually had deep affections for His people.

David was different from those of his generation. He had a different spirit and a different heart. He was on a journey which started by encountering God in the beauty of nature and moved deeper into encountering God's own affections toward him. Psalm 69: 8-10 describes the consequences of this:

*"I have become a stranger to my brothers, an alien to my mother's sons."*

In other words, 'I have been rejected by those closest to me (even my family) and people think I'm weird.' Why?

*"For zeal for Your house has consumed me..."*

'I have been rejected because my passion to be close to You, God, has consumed me.'

And then during his kingship, in his old age, I can imagine his generals, his advisors and his children gather around him one day and ask, 'David, in your whole life what is the one thing out of

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everything you want to be remembered for?' Remember this is now the richest, most powerful man of a generation!

You can almost hear his generals anticipating his response as they remember the glory days, 'Oh it has to be the battle when we hid in the forest and God blew the wind through the tops of the trees to tell us when to ambush the Philistines. It was glorious! (2 Samuel 5:24)'

Or you can hear his financial advisors exclaim, 'No it has to be the way you're building the city of Jerusalem as the crown of God's glory on the earth. It has to be! (2 Samuel 5:9-12)'

His children break into the conversation, 'No, no what about the time you took a sling and you were just a teenager and nobody thought anything of you. You took on a giant and won a great victory for Israel. Then you got the money and the girl! (1 Samuel 17)'

But at this point I hear David erupting, 'No, no, you don't understand. You're my closest friends and you don't understand me! There is only one thing I have wanted. One thing I have ever desired. There's only one thing I have always asked of the Lord,

*"One thing have I asked of the LORD, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days*

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*of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to inquire in his temple.” (Psalm 27:4)*

Delight was what motivated David’s obsession and pursuit of God and His delight came from encountering who God was, the beauty of God’s character and affections.

This is the cry that God saw in David’s heart as he spent his days on the hills of Bethlehem with the sheep. At the core of his being, as his primary pursuit in life, David didn’t want to be king, he didn’t want to be rich and famous. First and foremost, he wanted his heart to be filled to overflowing with the delight that comes from encountering the beauty of God in a deeper and deeper way. He wanted to feel the affections of God toward Him and to return those affections in fiery, passionate, all-consuming love. This was the definition of his success and the foundation of his identity. This was the heart of the man who God chose FOR HIMSELF and made king of His people.

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Therefore, to discover why and how to study the Song of Songs, we need to see this book through the

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lens of the beauty of God. This book describes the journey God takes a man or woman on to reveal His beauty and to wholly captivate them with who He is. It describes the beauty of the way God feels toward His people all through our journey of faith. When these feelings are revealed to the human spirit they cause us to be filled with delight, fascination and burning passion for Him. There is no greater pleasure in the whole of creation. This is what we were made for! Both the beauty of God's emotions towards us and the beauty of His leadership in our lives (because of how He feels about us) are revealed through the Song of Songs.

In other words, the Song of Songs describes the 'why' behind the 'what' of the Bible. We all know the 'what' of the gospel – what Jesus did so we could be saved and the glorious rewards of this. But few people ever study or investigate the 'why' of the gospel. Why did Jesus die on the cross? What did He feel that caused Him to do what He did? What was in His heart? What is in Jesus' heart even now as He looks upon us? When we understand this, when the truth of how God feels about us hits our hearts, even a little, then we will respond with radical love in return.

Right now, God is looking for a people after His own heart. He is looking for people who know and

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love His character; who are students of His emotions - of the 'why' behind the 'what'. That's the kind of church Jesus is coming back for. The 'what' of the gospel is important and touches us deeply but when we begin to see the 'why' behind it then our hearts are awakened in a whole new way. We enter into a depth of relationship with our Lord that we never thought possible. Life abundant springs forth inside of us. Jesus is coming back for people who, like David, are consumed by their pursuit of His heart as a response to His emotions, thoughts and feelings (beauty) towards them. Today, the prayer rooms springing up across the earth serve as the Holy Spirit's invitation to go on this pursuit, prayer as the means and the Song of Songs as the road map of the journey God wants to take us on.

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### PRACTICAL 1: PURSUING THE BEAUTY OF THE LORD

#### **Four dimensions of God's beauty:**

- A. God's creation (Psalm 19:1-6). This includes God's natural creation like mountains, lakes, stars, galaxies etc. but also those things you love in life, those things that touch your heart. Examples include: movies, music, experiences and/or hobbies. I guarantee that you love these things because they carry some aspect of God's beauty.
  
- B. God's Word (Psalm 19:7-11). This includes the story God is telling through history. It is a stunning story! It is a story from which all the other stories ever told through books, plays and movies draw their inspiration. Psalm 119:103 – *How sweet are Your words to my taste, Sweeter than honey to my mouth!*
  
- C. God's character (Song of Songs). This includes the beauty of God's feelings and thoughts towards us which we experience by revelation of the Holy Spirit (Song of Songs). It also includes His judgements which are designed to bring people to repentance and

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back into the experience of His love (Isaiah 26:9). Finally, it includes the journey He takes His people on to awaken their hearts to love (Psalm 19:12-14 and Song of Songs).

- D. God's physical beauty (Revelation 1, 4, 5, Isaiah 6 and Ezekiel 1)

**Ponder the answers to the following questions (write your answers in a journal):**

1. What do you love about God? What aspects of His character do you love? Be specific. For example: *I love the way God provides. It's always unexpected. It's always out-of-left-field. It's so often at the last minute and yet so perfectly. It always brings an explosion of joy in my heart.*
2. Spend time in prayer thanking God for these things.
3. What do you love in life? What hobbies, activities, interests, experiences, movies and music do you love? Ask God to reveal Himself in these.