

The Search for Love

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[0:00] Okay, well good morning everyone. Lovely to see you. If you have a Bible, then please can I invite you to turn to the Song of Songs and feel zero embarrassment in turning to the contents page of your Bible.

If you don't have a Bible, you haven't brought one, you're welcome to use the ones in the pews roundabouts or you can scroll on your phone if that's easier for you or you can just follow along on the screen.

But as you're doing that, let me just introduce myself. My name is Graham and I'm the pastor of the church here and it's just a joy to welcome you this morning. These are always some of the highlights of our church life, mornings like this, hearing the difference that Jesus makes in people's lives.

It's particularly welcome if you're new here, if this is your first Sunday with us, maybe this is even your first Sunday in church in a long, long time. You are so, so welcome and we're going to get into Song of Songs chapter 2 verse 8. We're going to read it in about 10 minutes time.

But complete the saying. It's from a song. You ready? Can anybody find me?

[1:18] Right, so. Undoubtedly my favourite Queen song. I wonder if it's yours. Can anybody find me somebody to love? Went to see the musical a number of years ago.

Fantastic if you're looking for something to watch. But can anybody find me somebody to love?

Imagine with me for a moment that we were to beam an alien down to planet Earth.

Someone who had never interacted with a human being before. And we asked them to study human beings and our culture for a whole year. What we watch, what we do, what we listen to, how we interact, what makes us happy, what makes us sad.

And at the end of that year we asked them one simple question. In 10 words or less. What do you think they think the purpose of their existence is?

I reckon that they'd concur with Queen. I reckon they'd come back and tell us that human beings are on a quest for love. It's everywhere, isn't it?

[2:26] From love songs to dating apps. From novels to reality TV love shows. From sitcoms to rom-coms. We all need to find someone of whom we can say, to quote Jerry Maguire, You complete me.

And the thing is, because that's the cultural air that we breathe in and out every single day, Friends, we can be duped into thinking that if we haven't found a partner, Or if this kind of love isn't something that we experience, Then somehow we are missing out.

I wonder if you've ever felt like that, or maybe even today you feel like that. It's the pressure that the culture puts on us. And if that is you today, If you remember last week, this is what we said.

What we're doing in this series, This series is all about turning down the volume of the world song, And turning up the volume of what God has to say in this whole area of sex and romance, In these song of songs.

This eight chapter love drama, That celebrates the love and sexual intimacy that is enjoyed, In an exclusive relationship between a married man and a woman.

[3:48] And you think to yourself, Is that in the Bible? You better believe it's in the Bible. Can I give you two quick reasons why we should be glad it's in the Bible? Firstly, because this offers us God's wisdom in this whole area of sex and romance, Which is better by far than anything that you'll hear out there.

Do you remember we thought about last week, If you were here, We thought about what the experts are saying, And we thought about Louise Perry, And we also thought about this American, This American expert who's studying these things, Called Gene Twenge, Who's written this book called Generations.

And both of them are saying, In this whole area, Something's not working. Something's not quite right. And because of that, We thought about the fact that God is worth a hearing.

And in particular, I want to tell you this morning, Wherever you are on this, Whatever you've come to church with, However you would identify yourself as, Jesus is worth pondering.

You know, In our Western world today, Being single is fine. People can get their heads around that. In fact, If anything, It's kind of celebrated, Life without limits and boundaries.

[5:02] But a life without sex is incomprehensible. Surely that is to miss out on experiencing, What it is to be truly human.

And yet meet Jesus in the Gospels. And he kind of says to us, Are you sure? Jesus is, The most wonderfully complete, And fully alive person, Who has ever existed.

You look at him, And you conclude, Here is a man, Who doesn't seem to be missing out, On all that life has to offer.

Look at him, And see, A life defined by, Intimacy. Because it is a life, Full of deep friendships.

And yet, Here is the wonder of wonders, None of those friendships, Are sexual or, Romantic. Now, Sam Albury is a guy, To read on this, He is wonderful.

[6:11] He comments on Jesus' life, And he puts it like this, As he looks at our modern culture, He says this, In his wonderful book, Seven Myths About Singleness, If you want it, Come and grab it from me, You can borrow it, You can order it online as well.

He says this, And try this one on for size, It is possible to have lots of sex, And no real intimacy, But the reverse is also true. It is possible to have a lot of intimacy, In life, And for none of it to be sexual. Friends, Jesus is the wonderful stone, In the shoe to the world's soul. And here's the invitation, Let Jesus intrigue you.

Have you ever read about him? Maybe you're here this morning, You've never heard of this stuff before, If you knew there was going to be this, It wouldn't have come. But let Jesus intrigue you.

Have you ever read about him? Because the Song of Songs, Is one glorious melody, That lulls us, Towards the far superior love, That he has for us.

And that's the love of which marriage love, Is but a faint echo of. And that's the love, That we were born to know. What we're thinking about today, I don't think it's any exaggeration to say, And it reaches its peak next Sunday, Please come back from that.

[7:37] What we're thinking about today, Really is the meaning of the cosmos. And so as we turn to chapter two, We're back with this young couple again. If you remember last week, We thought it was kind of like their first date.

Next Sunday is going to be their wedding day in this song. But this week we're going to see, As they sing to us about their love for each other, We're going to see how they're going to continue to grow, And mature, As they head towards being married.

So we're going to pick it up at verse eight. Now, Last week was the love at first sight part of the song. If you remember this, Your eyes, Your neck, Your smell, Your name.

And we all giggled, As Bogdan tried to read it. And if it was all butterflies in the tummy last week, This week is brought to you by the words, And look out for these in the reading, Is brought to you by words like your voice, Your face.

And all of this is trying to communicate to us, That there's a maturity now to their love for each other. Look out for that. But the key verse today is verse 16. It's on there, On the screen. And this is how, I think that's 2.16.

[8:48] This is how she summarizes their relationship. She says, And I think you could argue this is the key verse to the whole book. My beloved is mine, And I am his.

So Jonathan is going to come and read this now, And then we'll get into it together. Yeah, so hopefully you have it by now. It's page 681, If you're using this.

Psalm, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, And if you hit Isaiah, You've gone too far. So Song of Songs, And it'll be on the screen, So feel free just to look at that as we read.

So chapter 2, verse 8. Listen, my beloved, Look, here he comes, Leaping across the mountains, Bounding over the hills. My beloved is like a gazelle or a young stag.

Look, there he stands behind our wall, Gazing through the windows, Peering through the lattice. My beloved spoke and said to me, Arise, my darling, my beautiful one, Come with me.

[9:56] See, the winter is past, The rains are over and gone. Flowers appear on the earth, The season of singing has come, The cooing of doves is heard in our land.

The fig tree forms its early fruit, The blossoming vines spread their fragrance, Arise, come my darling, My beautiful one, Come with me.

My dove in the clefts of the rock, In the hiding places on the mountainside, Show me your face, Let me hear your voice, For your voice is sweet, And your face is lovely.

Catch for us the foxes, The little foxes that ruin the vineyards, Our vineyards that are in bloom. My beloved is mine, And I am his.

He browses among the lilies, Until the day breaks and the shadows flee, Turn, my beloved, And be like a gazelle, Or like a young stag on the rugged hills.

[11:03] All night long on my bed, I looked for the one my heart loves, I looked for him, But did not find him. I will get up now and go about the city, Through its streets and squares, I will search for the one my heart loves, So I looked for him, But did not find him.

The watchmen found me, As they made their rounds in the city, Have you seen the one my heart loves? Scarcely had I passed them, When I found the one my heart loves.

I held him and would not let him go, Till I had brought him to my mother's house, To the room of the one who conceived me. Daughters of Jerusalem, I charge you, By the gazelles and by the does of the field, Do not arouse or awaken love, Until it so desires.

God and Father, We just ask your blessing to be on your word, Speak to each one of us through it, And help Graham as he comes back to speak to us.

In the name of the Lord Jesus, Amen. Thanks Jonathan. Folks, into verse 8. Feel the anticipation, And the excitement in her voice, She's singing to us, As she awaits for her man to arrive.

[12:27] Do you see it? Here's the best part, It's reciprocal. It's not just her who feels this, She is singing about it, He longs to see her too.

Imagine the scene, He's been texting her all day, Can't wait to see you, Clocking off work at 5, He finishes work, He's sharing his live location with her on WhatsApp, Aerosmith, I don't want to miss a thing, Is playing in his earphones.

See how this is communicated to us in the verbs, Right? Didn't do that well at English at school, But I remember what a verb is, It's a doing word, Right? Leaping, Bounding, Do you see the words?

Like a gazelle, There's the simile that she's using, So she's communicating to us, That her man is making an effort, He longs to see her, And then all of a sudden, Do you see in the text?

He's there, He's gazing through the windows, He's looking through the curtains, Which I don't think is meant to sound as creepy as it reads, Okay? But verse 10, She says, My beloved speaks to me, So we shift from her song now to his song, And here's what I want you to notice about their song, I want you to notice firstly, How he woos her with his words, Arise my beautiful one, Come away, Do you see that's repeated?

[13:52] At the end of verse 13, Which is his way of saying, I want your undivided attention, And in turn, You've got mine, And what we get from verse 11, Is him talking about, A changing of the season, Do you see it?

He's saying, Summer's here, The winter's past, The flowers are appearing, They're singing in the air, The birds are out, The smells are there, The fig tree ripens, That's what he's saying, We don't have time to go into it, But all of that, All of that is faint echoes, Of Genesis 1, Right, Of the Garden of Eden, That's what's meant to be communicated to us here, Summer, Is here, Sounds very much like, What we're experiencing right now, Doesn't it?

Love that every year in Edinburgh, Seeing the cherry blossom appear, Even got the whiff the other day, Of freshly cut, Mown grass, I don't know why someone's not put that, In a scented candle,

Because that is one of my favourite smells, Do you know the smells of summer?
And what he's saying to her there, Is he's communicating, A change of the season, Is he's saying,
It's now time for us, To move towards a new season, Of being married, That's what he's saying, So
verse 15, Put away the little foxes, Again, That is just the things, That distract, That get in the way,
So, Read it today, This is, Put your phone on, Do not disturb mode, Stop looking at your emails,
Turn off the telly, Verse 14, And let me see your face, And let me hear your voice, Because I want
you, And I've got eyes for you alone, My beloved is mine, And I am his, That's what makes her sing,
That refrain, She's telling us about the security, The life and acceptance, That now dominates, And
pervades the relationship together, And secondly,
See how she responds, With her heart, Now you might not get this, From first reading, But what
happens as you hit chapter three, Is that there's a sudden, Scene shift, So when she says, On my
bed at night, Do you see it?

[16:17] Verse one, She's telling us about a dream, That she had, And that
dream, Was essentially a bit of a nightmare, Because in that dream, She
thought she'd lost her man, And in the dream, Verse two, Do you see what
she's describing, She was doing in this dream, She was running about the
city, Looking for him, Asking people, Have you seen him?

And they say, No, We haven't seen him, And then all of a sudden, She does find him, And see how
she responds, When she finds him, Understandably, Verse four, I held him, And I did not, Want to
let him go, So great, His, Her joy, At finding her man, And then, And then she turns to her friends,
Remember these daughters of Jerusalem, Who are in the background of this song, And she says to
them, I adjure you, Now notice the strength of what she's saying there, She's effectively saying, As
she wakes up from this dream, She speaks to her friends, Having imagined that scenario, Of losing
her love, She says, I adjure you, Which means, I want you to promise, So strongly does she feel,
About what she's about to say, And for the second time in this letter, Maybe we saw it last week,
She says, Verse five, Do not stir up, Or awaken love, Until it pleases,

Or in other words, Until the time is right, The sexual intimacy of this song, The arena that God
created for it, Is intimacy in the context, Of commitment, So what is God teaching us here, In this
little section, Remember we thought last week, Because this is wisdom literature, This is all about
how to live, In God's way, In God's world, For his glory, And for our good, We've got to ask
ourselves, As we come to the wisdom literature section, Of our Bibles, What is this teaching us,
What is there here for us, And let me just go for this, Okay, What is God teaching us here, I think
this song, Confronts two cultural lies, And hear the first one, In her voice, Here's the first lie, It's that
sex is just physical, Now try and do this with straight face,

There was a song, From a few decades ago, When I was growing up, Which had the chorus, You
and me baby, Ain't nothing but mammals, And you could not miss, The central idea of the song,
That if you have sexual urges, The natural thing to do, Is to express them, Why would you think,
Anything otherwise, But in her song, Friends, Let me say, In love, And respect, Hear her say, Not
true, For see in chapter three, Her sing about, Not her body, What does she sing about, And you
get it four times, It's her soul, And when the Bible speaks about the soul, It's talking about that
place, Of our desires, Emotions, And feelings, It is kind of the place, Out of which we live, And
here's what we see, In the opening chapters of the Bible, As God makes all things,
And the pinnacle of his creation, Is when he makes human beings, In his image, There's a
difference, Between human beings and animals, We're made from the dust, Just like the animals
are, And we'll return to the dust, Just like animals do, But we are profoundly different, Because God
made human beings, Body and soul beings, And what she is telling us, In her song, Is that she is
ready, To give herself to her man, Both body and soul, To the one that she loves, And so she's
turning to her friends, And she's saying, Unless you're ready, To go body and soul, With someone,
Now's not the right time, And she's saying, You've got to be so careful, Who you give yourself to,
On this level, Come back to this in a minute, Okay, But here's the second lie,

[20:47] It's that dating is just casual, And we hear this, Not in her
voice, We hear it in his voice, Now the Bible doesn't speak, And we hear
it in a minute, And we hear it in a minute, And we hear it in a minute,
And we hear it in a minute, And we hear it in a minute, I guess what we
would call, Today we'd call it dating, It's kind of written at a
different time, And place, But there is wisdom here for us, If we look

hard enough for it, And I take it dating, Is just a normal thing that we do, Is we seek to get to know, Other people better, And we don't need to turn up, To coffee number one, Ready to talk about, All our life expectations and plans, Okay, The other person will probably run a mile, However, In this whole area of dating, Friends, As believers and followers of Jesus, I think the call is that we do it differently, We've always got to be thinking about, Not what's in it for us, But thinking about how we're treating the other person,

The signals that we're sending, Perhaps the expectations, Expectations that we're maybe creating, I think that's what the couple in this song are telling us, That dating isn't the destination, What dating should be heading to, Is towards marriage, Now we don't put too much pressure, On this kind of stuff, But honestly, Just speaking honestly for a moment, See some of my biggest regrets in life, Are all to do with this whole area of dating, And particularly before I met Alex, How casually I sometimes treated people, And I wish I had my time back, To do it differently, Now all of us in some way or another, Are licking our wounds, Or maybe hiding our faces, Or even our shoulders are dropping, From the pain of, When it goes wrong in this area, And I don't want you sitting there thinking, One of two things, And let me just pastorally, Say this to you, Do not sit there thinking, First of all, That this doesn't apply to me, Okay, It may well be that this is not where you're at, But can I say, It may well be one day where you are at, So it's worth putting this wisdom in the bank, To call upon maybe later, But it's most definitely, In a church this size, The place where someone else will be at, So can I advise, It's always what we want to do, Is be thinking about our brothers and sisters, Who we're walking with each and every day, What is the wisdom here that I might learn, And even though it's not directly applicable to me, Is there someone else in this church, Who I can get alongside, And help them journey towards, Walking with Jesus more faithfully, So don't think this doesn't apply to you, But I think the second thing I want to say, Is don't think you're alone, I get that this might be horrendously painful, For so many of us,

And don't believe the lie, That the devil might be saying in your ear right now, That you are on your own, That no one else understands, What you're going through, No one else will care, What's happened to you in the past, No one knows what to do, With the struggles that you're facing, And will face in the future, Not true, And I take it as a sign of a healthy church, Is that whatever is going on here, We recognise that we walk through life together, And that we're always thinking about, How we can safely, And appropriately, Help each other, I would love this to be a church, Where we are open about the deepest things, That matter to us most in life, And for so, so many of us, It will be this, And there are so many people out there, In this church family, Who have all sorts of experiences, And all sorts of different things, In this area, Why not reach out to someone this morning,

Someone who you think, Might be able to help, It is the beauty of the church, But here's the ultimate thing, I want to say this morning, Is however this lands on us, Whatever's going on in our lives just now, There's one thing that we have in common, And it's that we need to get to Jesus, Let's be reminded, Just for the last five minutes, Okay, That his grace is deep, His love is sure, His patience is long, His forgiveness is great, That healing is possible, All because giving fresh starts, Is what he specializes in, And that's why this last point, Is all about him, Because as well as correcting, Some cultural lies, This song, It highlights one, Heavenly truth, And it's this, That there is, Regardless of our marital status,

[25:58] Or relationship history, Or sexual experiences, There is a much, More wonderful love, That's on offer, What a time to jump in, Friends, There's something so much greater, On offer this morning, In fact, It's the one that our desires, For love and intimacy, Like Hansel and Gretel's breadcrumbs, We are meant to pick up, And see that it all leads to him, Her line, My beloved is mine, And I am his, Let's think about that, For just a minute friends, The passion that's at the heart, Of Christianity, Is not primarily, Our passion for Jesus, I think that's what Grace was saying, In her story this morning, Because that will so often, Blow hot and cold with the seasons, The passion at the heart of Christianity, Is his passion for us, And the human love of marriage, Gives us one of the

clearest glimpses, Of it, The moment you put your faith,

In Jesus, And what he's done on the cross for you, You can say that, Of him, The Bible says, That we are united to him, That's what baptism is, Is what we've just witnessed, Is what Grace was saying, And I just love how she put it, That my life is now wholly identified, And caught up with, And being one with Jesus, That's our identity, He's taken our sin, He's extended to us his grace, We are now clothed in his righteousness, That is our status now before him, But it's better than that, Do you know what would be the weirdest date night ever, If Alex and I planned a romantic dinner together, We lit a candle, We poured the wine, And we sat down, And we both stared at our marriage certificate, Instead of staring, At each other,

See being one with Jesus, Is more than just a status, As glorious as that is, We are declared right before our maker, That union that we have with Jesus, Is meant to lead to, Wonderful communion with Jesus, So when she declares, My beloved is mine, And I am his, Do you trust him today? You can say that of him, But here's a more wonderful thought, The one that I honestly, Had never occurred to me, Until a couple of weeks ago, When reading this, Here's this thought, Jesus says that, Of us, How often we think of Jesus, Like he's walking around, With a do not disturb me t-shirt on, When the opposite is true, Let me see your face, Let me hear your voice, Put away the little foxes, The things that distract, Come away with me, Do you hear his voice, In the song of songs, He is the lover of our souls, Such is his love for us, And so I've been thinking all week, Just as we close, How do we respond to that?

Well here's a cool story, I read, This week, Down at Embankment Station, Back in 2013 in London, They set about trying to modernise, The platform announcements, And you know, If you've been to the underground, You'll know this, This announcement always comes up, Please mind the gap, So they tried to modernise, This embankment station, Everyone thought it was a good idea, Everyone thought this was a great idea, Except one lady, And her name was Margaret, And she complained about it, And everybody thought she was just being, Stuck in the mud, Right, Why is she kicking up a fuss about this?

[30:05] She says, Can we have the old voice back? Everyone thought she's being difficult, Can't she just get with the times? Until that is, She told them why, She said really simply, That's the voice of my husband, So here's what she'd been doing, For years and years and years, Every day after he died, She would make the effort, Fight the crowds, Walk along the street, Through the, Through the, Through the park, To the station, Through the barriers, And she would just sit on the platform, And she would just listen for his voice, And I love that intentionality, But that is what Jesus calls us to do today, When it comes to hearing his voice, When we pick up our Bibles in the morning, Are we listening for his voice?

We need to get to him, What does Jesus say? What can we say is true about him? My beloved is mine, And I am his, Friends, let me pray, I heard the voice of Jesus say, Come unto me and rest, Lay down, O weary one, Lay down your head upon my breast, I came to Jesus, As I was, Weary, worn, and sad, I found in him, A resting place, And he has made me glad, And so Father, I pray that your spirit, Would be working amongst us this morning, Father, I recognize, The many different ways, That this will have landed, On different people this morning, Father, help us to be a church, That cares for each other well,

And we just thank you for Jesus, Truly there is no one like him, Thank you for celebrating this morning, Hearing Grace's story, About he is the one who transforms lives, And so Father, I pray particularly for those of us here this morning, For whom maybe that isn't true, Maybe we're sitting on the fence, Maybe we're unsure, Would we find in him this morning, A love that surpasses anything else, We have ever experienced in life before, Thank you that truly, He is the one who is gentle, And lowly in heart, And in him, We can find rest for our souls, Father, thank you that you love us, And we pray these things, In his precious name, Amen, Amen.