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COLLEGE

TEXTBOOK (ACADEMIC VERSION)

The Making of a Bride

COURSE: SONG OF SOLOMON I (OT570)

Dr. Ron Cottle

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THE MAKING OF A BRIDE

THE MAKING OF A BRIDE

THE SONG OF SOLOMON

VOLUME I: CHAPTERS 1:1—5:1

TWELVE STEPS

FROM FRIEND TO BRIDE OF CHRIST

DR. RONALD E. COTTLE

The Making of a Bride: The Song of Solomon

"Twelve Steps From Friend to Bride of Christ"

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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 Solomon 2:14)

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Introduction

The Song of Solomon...

Is it simply mystic and erotic Near Eastern literature from 3,000 years ago? Or is it a majestic mix of difficult religious images and unrelated Jewish love poems?

When was the last time you heard a message or read a book on the Song of Solomon?

Let me tell you a secret: Most preachers and theologians carefully avoid the Song, simply because they don't understand the book. They dread the prospect of teaching from a book filled with so many hard-to-explain phrases and intimate sexual references.

Frankly, many of the newer books written about The Song of Solomon deeply disappoint me. Many interpreters follow a modern fad that arbitrarily rejects allegory and parable as useless teaching tools (someone should have notified Jesus about this). The "new and improved" method interprets the Song primarily as a kind of erotic sex manual.

I feel they have totally missed the true power of this most misunderstood of all books in the biblical canon. Remember that the finest and most valued treasures on earth tend to be buried deep in rock, or require diligence and hard labor to unearth them and present them to the world.

This is also true of the "true riches" embedded deeply within the Bible, only it takes more than diligence and hard labor to

harvest spiritual treasure. It takes supernatural help from the Holy Spirit of God.

Allow the Holy Spirit to transform the Song of Solomon from "a book that has baffled scholars and religious leaders for thousands of years" into a "divine stairway to deeper relationship with Jesus Christ, the Bridegroom of the Ages."

I was one of those who really didn't feel comfortable with the Song of Solomon until God assigned the Song to me after I had a painful accident on a runaway scooter and a steep incline several years ago.

Then an emergency hospital visit turned into a number of days of mandatory bed rest. When I asked the Lord to help me make the most of that painful time, He led me to launch an in-depth study of the Song of Solomon. (He had finally made me "sit still" long enough to tackle a project I'd avoid otherwise.)

The Song came alive to me as never before in nearly five decades of scholarly study, pastoral ministry, and academic teaching.

The Holy Spirit revealed twelve vital stairsteps of divine relationship concealed within the first four chapters of the Song.

These stages transport followers of Christ from the first step of friendship all the way to the twelfth step of union with Him as part of His corporate "sister-bride" at the wedding supper of the Lamb!

Each step will amaze you, and the details of the journey will answer and explain important questions you've had about your life, your trials, and even some of the deep frustrations you've felt along the way.

As you progress through this book and the Song of Solomon, expect your faith to expand and your excitement and love for Christ Jesus to blossom as never before.

I pray *The Making of a Bride* will strengthen your faith, sharpen your hunger for God and His Word, and equip you to press on in your journey through life with the Beloved, Jesus Christ!

Dr. Ronald E. Cottle
Columbus, Georgia
February, 2016

THE MAKING OF A BRIDE
"THE ROCK-STAIRS"
of
THE SONG OF SOLOMON

STAGE A			STAGE B		
EXPERIENCES			RELATIONSHIPS		
I	II	III	IV	V	VI
SAVED by Him	HUNGER for Him	CHAMBER EXPERIENCES with Him	RELATIONSHIP with Him	COMMUNION with Him	SURRENDER to Him
FRIEND (Peaceful)	GOD—CHASER (Hungry)	LOVE (Intimate)	FAIREST AMONG WOMEN (Transparent)	DOVE (Devoted)	SEPARATED (Vulnerable)
1:1 (1 verse)	1:2—4a (2½ verses)	1:4b – 6 (2½ verses)	1:7 – 14 (8 verses)	1:15 – 2:7 (11 verses)	2:8 – 13 (6 verses)

TWELVE STAIRSTEPS
TO BECOME
"THE BRIDE OF CHRIST"

STAGE C			STAGE D		
LEGAL			WEDDING		
VII	VIII	IX	X	XI	XII
SECLUDED with Him	UNION with Him	TRANSFIGURED by Him	EXALTED by Him	SEATED IN THE HEAVENS with Him	SERVING OTHERS with Him
BETROTHED Chosen to Wife (Companion)	ESPOUSED (Legally Engaged)	TRANSPORTED to the WEDDING (Processional)	PREPARED for the WEDDING (Ready)	ENTHRONED (Established)	BRIDE (Partner)
2:14 – 3:3 (7 verses)	3:4 – 5 (2 verses)	3:6 – 11 (6 verses)	4:1 – 5 (5 verses)	4:6 – 8 (3 verses)	4:9 – 5:1 (9 verses)

STAGE A

EXPERIENCES

FROM PERFORMANCE TO EXPERIENCE

The First Stairstep – Saved and Obedient
Chapter 1 – Friend

The Second Stairstep – Hungry for More
Chapter 2 – God-Chaser

The Third Stairstep – Experiences of Intimacy
Chapter 3 – Lover

Chapter 1

STAIRSTEP 1
FRIEND

SAVED AND OBEDIENT

Ye are my friends, if ye do the things which I command you.
(John 15:14)

Nearly 3,000 years ago, the wisest man on earth penned an elaborate love poem under the inspiration of God. We have struggled to understand this poem ever since.

Solomon, the king of Israel and the son of David, describes the growing relationship between two primary characters: the Beloved (the bridegroom) and a young woman he first calls "fairest among women."

J. Hudson Taylor, founder of the China Inland Mission, said this in his book, *Union and Communion*:

> "The Song of Solomon is designed to lead the believer into the 'green pastures' of the Good Shepherd, thence to the 'banqueting house' (chambers of intimacy) of the King, and thence to the service of the 'vineyard' (ministry)…."[1]

Taylor wrote these words more than 100 years ago, hinting at the simple key that transformed the Song of Solomon from a Bible book I quietly avoided (and really didn't understand) into a wisdom-packed guide to spiritual maturity in Christ!

The truths Hudson Taylor gleaned from the Song of Solomon were embodied in Taylor's ministry as a pioneer missionary working in China.[2]

King Solomon penned The Song in 950 B.C., but despite the nearly 3,000 year time span, this book transformed *my life* as well. Its secrets can transform the life of *every* believer who is determined to follow in the footsteps of Jesus Christ, the Son of God and divine Bridegroom.

During my enforced in-house recuperation from an accident, I found a vital key to unlock the wonders of Solomon's masterpiece in Song 2:14:

> *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 Solomon 2:14, emphasis added)*

Working from the principle of "the secret places of the stairs" in this key passage, I began a detailed study of the first four chapters of the Song of Solomon. Referring often to the original Hebrew, I found *twelve steps* we must take in our individual journeys to "become the Bride."

The Song of Solomon appears to be several love poems describing the progression of a young Shulamite woman's relationship with her Beloved until she ultimately became what Solomon called his "sister-bride."

I found *12 stages* that directly *parallel* our path to maturity and intimacy with Jesus as members of the Bride of Christ.[3,4,5]

I am not the first to see stages of development in The Song that parallel the Christian life. In addition to J. Hudson Taylor, I read

A.B. Simpson's insights in *Loving As Jesus Loves*. He divided the Song into six sections:

> "The Waiting Days" (1:2—2:7), "The Wooing Days" (2:8—3:5), "The Wedding Days" (3:6—5:1), "The Testing Days" (5:2—8:1), "Home Longings" (8:2-4), and "Homecoming" (8:5-14).[6]

L.D. Johnson, on the other hand, divided the Song into a series of *love poems*. He provides *three invaluable guidelines* that will help you and me as we go through the love poems in the Song together:

> 1. They are about the *love* of one Person for another: the Risen Lord's passionate love for *you!*
>
> 2. They are "poetry." Poetry is the language of the emotions rather than reason. Poetry intends to elicit an emotional response, not just a rational one.
>
> 3. They may not be understood apart from the gift of *imagination*. Its fullest meanings are always concealed and revealed only in symbol.[8]

POETRY IS THE LANGUAGE OF EMOTIONS RATHER THAN REASON.

Johnson maintained that the entire Song of Solomon is allegorical and everything in it is figurative. The primary characters, even though they are rooted in the literal figures of King Solomon and his Shulamite bride, represent the Risen Christ and the Redeemed Soul.

The traditional view among Jewish scholars is that the "Shulamite" was Abishag the Shunammite (1 Kings 1:3-4), the young virgin woman brought to the aged King David before his death (to keep him warm). Since David was not intimate with her, they feel she later became King Solomon's wife. Meanwhile, Solomon represented the resurrected David.