



Love's Sustaining Connection

The Members, Every One In The Body

| conclusion

Introduction

The *Song of Solomon* is a classic love story that swept us up with its drama and caused us to be invested in the details of its main characters.

Song 2:9

My beloved is like a roe or a young hart: behold, he standeth behind our wall, he looketh forth at the windows, shewing himself through the lattice.

Song 2:10

My beloved spake, and said unto me, Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away.

The shepherd remained largely in the background, showing himself in the shadows. The Shulamite took center stage and struggled against Solomon and the other players. But somehow, we KNEW they would be together in the end.

Song 8:5

Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness, leaning upon her beloved?

As wonderful as the story might be, we have to wonder: why put this love story in the Bible? The Old Testament is a story of God's working among mankind in general and His dealings with Israel specifically. Why place a romantic love story in the middle of all that?

A Hint At Things To Come Before Adam and Eve were cast out of the Garden of Eden, God was hinting towards His much-bigger plans for mankind (**Genesis 3:15**). Even when He chose Abraham as the heir to the promise, God was indicating bigger things beyond one single nation (**Genesis 12:3**).

Yet despite these hints, the focus of the Old Testament remained on Israel: a Promised Land, divided among twelve tribes, and protected from her enemies.

potentates chosen to lead the nation

prophets called to deliver God's message

protection in wars and times of exile

provision of the Law of Moses, the Temple of Solomon, and an Altar where blood was applied to cover sins

In the New Testament God revealed His ultimate plan for mankind...A Savior, a sin offering, and a celestial hope. At the close of the Old Testament, God indicated His displeasure with Israel's failings:

Malachi 1:6-7

A son honoreth his father, and a servant his master: if then I be a father, where is mine honor? And if I be a master, where is my fear? saith the LORD of hosts unto you, O priests, that despise my name. And ye say, Wherein have we despised thy name? Ye offer polluted bread upon mine altar; and ye say, Wherein have we polluted thee? In that ye say, The table of the LORD is contemptible.

And yet, even then, there was a hint:

verse 11 For from the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same my name shall be great among the Gentiles..

In Jesus' public ministry, He spoke about the church, which was already fully-formed in the mind of God, as if it was already understood by His disciples:

Matthew 16:16

And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

Matthew 18:17

And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.

A Herald Of The Church Later, Paul met the Resurrected Lord on the road to Damascus and began his calling as the Apostle To The Gentiles. This led him to years of study in the Arabian wilderness where God's Spirit instructed him about the church.

Galatians 1:15-17 Ephesians 1:9-11 (3:3-7)

In his other epistles, Paul dropped further hints about this mystery that had been in place although unrevealed in past ages.

**Romans 11:25 (15:9-12) and
1 Corinthians 2:7 (15:51-52)**

Romans 16:25-26

Now to him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began, but now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith:

Did you catch that? The church was kept secret *since the world began*, but it has now been revealed by *the scriptures of the prophets*...that's another name for our Old Testament.

We would like to believe that while Israel had no idea about the church, if they look back with 20/20 historical vision, they can't help but see the church clearly in the *Song of Solomon*. One of the greatest clues in the Old Testament was hiding in plain sight.

but consider **2 Corinthians 3:14**

Yet, there it sits: this wonderful picture of a future plan, fulfilled in Christ and promised to see its fulfillment in eternity future. Even now, so many fail to see it for what it is.

A Help For Christian Living Throughout His public ministry Jesus declared His love for the church (**Ephesians 5:25**), determined His Holy Spirit would guide the church (**John 16:13**), and decided to return for His church (**John 14:3**).

Sadly, so many today want to view the church as optional. One of the most dangerous misconceptions in contemporary Christianity is the idea that following Jesus is primarily an individual endeavor.

The internet in general, and social media specifically, have diminished the Family of God and the Body of Christ. A majority of 'believers' view the church with a take-it-or-leave-it attitude. *Major holidays are fine, they reason, but my walk with Christ is a personal thing. And after all, I can sit here in the comfort of my home and avoid all the hypocrites.*

But if we missed the beauty of Christ's love for the church in *Song of Solomon*, we are just as likely to miss out on the benefits of the church today. By failing to understand the great love the shepherd had for the Shulamite, and the determination in which he delivered her unto himself, we miss the precious value of the church and the Savior who loves her still.

The Harm In Missing Church With so much emphasis on the church, let us not miss the warnings solved through the benefit of membership in the church:

Longevity We all have seasons of doubt and disappointment in our lives. The community provided by the church carries us through these difficult times.

Hebrews 10:25 Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.

Luke-Warmness Without the accountability and honest feedback that comes from community, we have a tendency to justify our compromises, rationalize our sins, and lose the ability to see our own blind spots. **Revelation 3:16**

Ephesians 4:15 But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ:

Lapses Our understanding of scripture is filtered through our cultural context and personal biases. The Bible, however, speaks to different classes, ages, races, perspectives, and life experiences. Church life adds another layer of growth to this.

1 Corinthians 12:13 For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.

Liability As believers, we have a responsibility to build up one another. Without fellowship, we will find it easier to compromise in private areas of our lives. Hidden sins like pride, lust, greed, and bitterness will grow unchecked because there is no one with permission to call them out.

James 5:16 Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.

Legacy Every believer has been given gifts to serve others in the Body of Christ. As a result, God has a purpose for every believer. Without the community of God's people, those gifts remain dormant and undeveloped.

2 Timothy 1:9 Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began...

Lethargy True growth only occurs through relationships and challenges. Without others to sharpen us, encourage us to take risks, and push us beyond our comfort zone, our spiritual life will plateau and eventually decline.

Proverbs 27:17 Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend.

Likeness Here's a profound thought: You cannot fully know Jesus by yourself. Through the church, we see who He really is. That is why there are so many names for God and Christ in the Bible. As people experienced the power of God, they came to know Him as The God Who Sees Me, The God Who Raises The Dead, and The Father of Mercies. Without the church, we will inevitably develop a Jesus who looks suspiciously like us.

Philippians 3:10 That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death;

NOTE: parts of this message were adapted from the book, *The Missing Messiah*, by Eric Idleman (ch. 11, *Following Jesus Together*)