

Glimpses of Our God

Love Stories

Lesson #12 for March 24, 2012

Scriptures: Genesis 2:21-25; Exodus 20:5; Isaiah 43:4; 62:5; Song of Songs; John 2:1-11.

1. This lesson is about the love of God. What does the expression “God is love” mean? (1 John 4:8,16) Theologians will be quick to point out that the word *love* in that expression is *agape*. *Agape* is a kind of principled love—doing what is right because it is right, loving because it is the right thing to do.
2. But, is God also love in any other sense? Is God romantic? What would that mean? The Bible is a kind of a history book—the only reliable record of the first half of our world’s history. It covers thousands of years of human and divine history. Considering all that is covered it is crammed into a very short book. A human historian would probably focus on major governments that were world powers. He would focus on kings and their battles. Would there be any room for love stories? The Bible is full of love stories.
3. God presents Himself all through Scripture as being in love with His people. Read Isaiah 43:4; 62:5. And then, there is the book called *Song of Songs* or *The Song of Solomon*. Jewish males were not supposed to read that book until they were 30 years old. Why is that book in the Bible? Is God trying to suggest that true romantic love, even sexual love, is an essential part of the binding cement that holds human families together, and thus, is the true foundation for society? Repeatedly, God suggested that He has taken the children of Israel in the Old Testament and the Christian church in the New Testament as His bride. God’s statements about His love for His people in Ezekiel 16 and 23 would be XXX-rated!
4. Jesus’ first miracle was performed at a wedding. At the end of the book of Revelation, God Himself invites all of us to become His bride. (Revelation 19:5-9) God relates to every being in the universe as if s/he were the only being in the universe.
5. The first human story is a story of love. God created Adam and left him as the sole human being on this earth just long enough for him to realize how much he wanted companionship. And then, God created Eve and performed the first wedding ceremony. The first Sabbath in the history of our world was not only a time of great rejoicing because of what God had accomplished in creation, but it was also the beginning of the honeymoon for Adam and Eve; and the whole universe was watching.
6. Read Genesis 2:21-25. Why do you think God made Adam and Eve in the sequence that He did? Was it because He, first of all, wanted Adam to feel a great need? And then, to reassure Adam that this beautiful creature standing beside him was “bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh”? God wanted both Adam and Eve to recognize how intimately related they really were. And if we are honest and we understand something about the reproductive process in human beings, we all are part of that same expanding body of God’s children.
7. Ellen White specifically said that we are a new and distinct order of beings. (*RH*, February 11, 1902 par. 1; *1BC* 1081.3; *SD* 7.2) There is no evidence anywhere in the inspired records that God gave the power of procreation to any other group in the universe. And most of the other species living on our planet can procreate as well, but Satan cannot. God made us male and female—with emotions and thoughts and bodies that are capable of reacting to each other and relating to each other in romantic and loving ways. Having children is incredibly useful in teaching us about God’s relationship with us! There are many possible ways for creatures to reproduce without having sex and the many emotions involved.

8. Adam's first response upon seeing Eve was a love poem. And God inspired Moses to give us the formula for a successful marriage right there. "That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united with his wife, and they become one." (Genesis 2:24, *GNB*) These verses could not have been spoken specifically for the benefit of Adam and Eve because at the time they did not know what parents were! God recognized that it would be necessary for each family to become a somewhat independent unit, separate from their parents.
9. And God created Adam and Eve without any artificial coverings of any sort; they were naked. (Genesis 2:25) Is this to suggest God's intention that under ideal circumstances we are to experience intense closeness and intimacy between husbands and wives? Considering how Satan has abused the idea of sex, it may be hard for us to remember that in the beginning God invented sex. Do you think God delighted in watching Adam and Eve react to each other? Was the story of Adam and Eve one of a perpetual honeymoon? In the past, many churches have taught that sex was the first sin! One church suggests that man had to sin and fall in order to rise to an even higher state.
10. Almost every one of the major characters in the Old Testament was involved in some kind of romance. Consider the stories of Abraham and Sarah, (Genesis 16) Isaac and Rebekah, (Genesis 24) and even Jacob and Rachel. (Genesis 29) Why did Jacob kiss Rachel when he first saw her? Was that acceptable behavior in his day? Did she resist in any way? Was he romantically attracted to Rachel as suggested by the Scriptures? Or, was he just incredibly happy to have found his relatives?
11. Although these love stories are touching, every one of them has its problems. There was Hagar, Abraham lying to Pharaoh and Abimelech, and Rebekah and Jacob working together to deceive Isaac. There was Leah and, of course, the two concubines.
12. Many of the most famous characters in the Old Testament had multiple wives. This raises questions in many people's minds about God's plan for marriage. Of course, it is easy to point to the Garden of Eden where Adam and Eve were one man and one woman. But, what about all those others? In effect, Abraham had three wives; Jacob, four; David, a score or more; and Solomon, a thousand. But, there are strong hints in the case of each of them that a one-man-one-woman relationship would have been much better.
13. So, how does all of this relate to God's love for us? There are a number of verses in the Bible talking about how jealous God was for His people. (Exodus 20:5; 34:14; Deuteronomy 4:24; Joel 2:18; Isaiah 33:1-16; *DA* 600) These verses mean that God thinks we are precious. But, therein lies a problem. If God wants to express His love for us, how does He do that? Is it possible for us to have an intensely intimate personal experience with God? How and where do we do that? Is it God's intention that such a relationship should be our prayer/faith experience?
14. So, what should a personal and intimate relationship with God mean to us? Someday in the new earth, will we be able to go up to God and give Him a big hug? Look at some of the texts in the Bible talking about how God feels about us: Isaiah 43:4; 62:5; Ezekiel 16:1-15, 20-22; Jeremiah 31:3; Revelation 21:9; Hosea 11:1-8. What do these verses imply?
15. In the *Koine* Greek of the New Testament, *love* in its various aspects is described by four different words: *epithumia* which means passion, *eros* which means primarily a sexual kind of love, *philia* which means brotherly or family love, and *agape* which means a principled love. So, out of these four choices, which would you say best describes God's love for us?
16. One of the problems in trying to understand God's love for human beings is the issue of suffering. It seems that if He truly loved us, an all-powerful God who is in control of the

universe could prevent suffering. For our Christian friends who do not understand the great controversy, this is a terrible conundrum. But, those Seventh-day Adventists who understand the great controversy and God's need for allowing us freedom if He is going to have real love, understand that suffering must come as a part of the demonstration of the consequences and results of sin. At the final end of time, what are the causes of suffering for God's people? Their own sins? The consequences of millennia of sin? Satan's direct attacks?

17. But, there is another side to that picture: What about the pleasures of life? Hebrews 11:25, *KJV* tells us that Moses chose rather to "suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season." Did Moses refuse to take an Egyptian wife or to become romantically involved? This might suggest to your mind that anything pleasant to the body is sinful! This was the view held by Plato and others in Greek philosophy leading to the idea that anything that is good for the body is bad for the soul and vice versa.
18. But, look at the facts. It was God who made us capable of perceiving the incredible range of beautiful colors by making our eyes the way they are. It was God who made it possible for us to experience the incredible variations in aroma and taste that make many aspects of life more enjoyable—including eating. It was God who also gave us reproductive systems that are not just mechanical ways to produce offspring but that are capable of very pleasant experiences for us to enjoy in the process. Considering all that has resulted from the abuse of sex down through the generations, why do you think God made us like that? Would we be better off without the sensory pleasure connected with sex? Satan has tried to destroy everything that God has made. Through our dealings with our own children, God intends for us to learn a great deal about the challenges that He faces with us.
19. It is important to notice also that human females were made with a monthly cycle and not an estrous cycle. In many animals, the females become sexually attractive only when it is time to reproduce. But, God made us so that we could enjoy the sensory pleasures of the sexual relationship without having to become pregnant.
20. That brings us back to *The Song of Solomon*. Through the very explicit language in this book, is God trying to tell us that the romantic and sexual relationship which is part of marriage at its best—when carried out following Christian principles—is exactly the kind of experience He wants to have with us? Does God love us only in an *agape* way? Does He love us as a Father? That would be like *philia*, a family kind of love. Does He even love us as a bride—to spend time with us, to enjoy us? What kind of love would that be?
21. Considering the crude, licentious, and abusive ways in which sex has become a major part of our culture, we might be inclined to think that God would want us to stay away from it completely. Recent evidence suggests that children who are sexually abused in childhood are much more likely to become obese and much harder to treat for their obesity later in life.
22. The story of Jesus at the wedding in Cana is a familiar one to Christians. (John 2:1-11) Many scholars believe that this wedding was of some member of Jesus' and Mary's extended family—perhaps a cousin. That may be why Mary seemed to have felt responsible when the wine had run out. While we do not have space to discuss that issue in this lesson, there is no reason to believe that the wine which Jesus created was alcoholic. But, in the extended, perhaps week-long, ceremonies at such a wedding, Jesus created between 90 and 120 gallons of fantastic, tasty grape juice. You can be sure that the wedding guests never forgot!
23. But, before we try to suggest that all such pleasures are only for the married, we need to remember that Jesus Himself never married. John the Baptist never married. Jeremiah never

married. There is a place for singles in our church.

24. Considering all that we have discussed so far, why did God describe the redeemed as His bride? What do you think will happen at the marriage supper of the Lamb? (Isaiah 62:5; Zephaniah 3:17; Revelation 19:6-9)
25. The Bible clearly suggests that God's ideal for marriage is one man married to one woman. This is supposed to be a committed, tender, intimate, and beautiful relationship in which the man and woman each learn from the other how to be more like God. Remember that both men and women were created in the image of God. How can we convince our young people that waiting for the intimate aspects of marriage until after the wedding ceremony takes place is always the best plan?
26. Read Jeremiah 31:3. What kind of love is being talked about there? Will those Christians who have experienced a true, loving, Christian marriage relationship on this earth have a head start in their relationship with God? Does romance which is carried out following God's principles produce a win-win situation?
27. How can we as a church foster attitudes and activities to promote both physical and emotional intimacy among our young people in a true Christian setting?
28. Do we believe that God has created each one of us with an immense ability to give and receive love?
29. There are some very close and intimate relationships in the Bible which were not of a marriage type: Paul and Timothy, Naomi and Ruth, as well as David and Jonathan. Was there anything illicit about those relationships?
30. Certainly, all of us would recognize that isolation, emotionally and physically, is never God's ideal. We need to learn to love each other, to care for each other, and to complement or complete each other.
31. We always need to keep in mind that *love* is a code word for God in the best setting. Satan's codeword is *selfishness*. We are not just talking about a nice, warm feeling. We are talking about a principle to guide every part of our lives.
32. We all should recognize that life is a string of relationships: parent with child, sibling with sibling, husband with wife, even relationships with friends and pets. Building and maintaining the best kind of relationships should be a priority for every Christian.
33. In light of all that we have studied, is it clear to you why God did not create Adam and Eve at exactly the same time? Would we dare to say—as some woman, no doubt, has suggested—that God took one look at Adam and said, “I can do better than that”?
34. Taken together, the entire biblical record suggests that God would like to have a honeymoon with us which lasts forever. Have we experienced enough of the right kind of Christian relationships in our life to have some kind of idea what that might be like?

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