

Play it Again, Solomon!

**A Study and Interactive Workbook
of the Song of Solomon**

Hank and Cathy Pott

2006

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Introduction to Song of Solomon Manual

Cathy and I served the post-secondary students of southern Africa for ten years, from 1974-1984. During that time we inquired often of the students in ten countries: "God has called us to open and share the Scriptures with you. What are the concerns and needs that you would like to see our God address? Please tell us where you are itching, so that we can scratch in the right places."

A common response was that our African brothers and sisters were keen to hear clear and practical teaching in the areas of "courtship", marriage, and sex. This felt need is probably shared by most of the world's people (!), but it certainly has a prominent place in Africa...

Cathy and I had read the Song of Solomon, in alternating chapters, on our wedding night (as I recall, she read her chapters slowly and thoughtfully, and I read mine rather rapidly...)

Seven years later, we came across Craig Glickman's *Song for Lovers* (IVP, 1976), and were off and running. He scratched in so many itchy places!! Since that day in 1980, Cathy and I have read and reflected much on these 117 verses in the middle of Scripture. And for twenty-five years we have taught them, for instance, in a 30 minute summary for a church audience, as an opening 18 sermon series preached in our first church in Victoria, B.C. Canada, and as a 45 hour class for a wonderful group of Ethiopian theological students.

What follows is our effort to put some of our discoveries into print in the hopes that this amazing Song will be heard, and sung, far beyond where our voices can carry.

The design of our manual is somewhat unusual. We highly recommend using the manuscript approach to study, and the Song is printed in this way on one side only in order to make for easier photocopying. The four coloured sections contain not only teaching, but also discussion questions and other resources. Each of the fourteen smaller units is introduced by a page with a vertical black line on its far right edge. Finally, the appendix includes further resources, including an excellent bibliography.

It is our hope that the format will make the Song easy to read and to study, and a little easier to teach. We pray that the Song will contribute to a generation that will say "yes" to the joy of one man and one woman and one lifetime, and will say "no" to AIDS and other enemies of the marriages that God intends.

Someone has defined leadership as "the ability to plant a tree under whose shade they will not expect to sit." Let's all plant some trees.

Our manual has three main parts.

I. Introduction

1. Our overall outline
2. "Appetizer" article by Chuck Missler.
3. Manuscript copy of the Song of Solomon
4. Two articles explaining the manuscript approach

II. Main Body of Teaching (in four colour-coded parts)

1. A "Ready?" page, which contains a set of questions designed to get us into the passage. (Each of these fourteen sections is set off by a black top corner for easier reference.)
2. About three pages of reflection on each section, sharing what Cathy and I have found helpful and significant in each passage.
3. Other resources clarifying and amplifying the message contained in each of these passages.
4. A page of response which is designed to make the song as practical and lasting as possible.

III. Appendix

1. A possible weekend format. We believe that the Song's fourteen sections divide nicely into four parts, and so we include outlines for four talks and also four sets of questions. They could be used, for instance, for Friday evening, Saturday morning and evening, and Sunday morning talks of 30-45 minutes each, followed by 45-90 minutes of group discussion.
2. A couple of written resources by the Potts:
 - a. An overall introduction and summary of the Song of Solomon, contributing (hopefully!) to the vast amount of material already available.
 - b. An article written for *The Banner*, a monthly publication of the Christian Reformed Church, which could be easily adapted into a sermon.
3. A couple excellent contributions from current commentaries:
 - a. An excerpt from *The Message of the Song of Songs* by Tom Gledhill
 - b. *Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon* by David Hubbard (The Communicators Commentary Series)
4. An excellent biography is supplied at the end, taken from *The Song of Songs* by Tremper Longman III (NICOT Commentary Series)

Our Overall Outline

COURTSHIP	→	CENTREPIECE	→	CONFLICT	→	CONCERT
1.1- 3.5		3.6 – 5.1		5.2 – 6.13		7.1 – 8.14

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The Ultimate Manual on Sex? The Song of Songs by **Chuck Missler**

Here is a book of the Bible which is among the least studied and the most emotionally controversial. It's a book with only 117 verses and 470 Hebrew words;¹ yet it is among the most difficult and mysterious books in the entire Bible. It's a book about lovemaking from an author who had 700 wives and 300 concubines (women who took his heart away from the Lord).²

A cursory glance at the Song's history of interpretation reveals a diversity of opinion unequalled in the study of any other Biblical work. The Song has been interpreted as: (a) an allegory, (b) an extended type, (c) a drama involving either two (or three) main characters, (d) a collection of Syrian wedding songs, (e) a collection of pagan fertility cult liturgies, and (f) an anthology of disconnected songs extolling human love.

S. Craig Glickman quotes a volume written on the history of the Song of Songs during the Middle Ages:

Over five hundred commentaries on the song remain with us from the first seventeen hundred years alone. Yet after these five hundred and perhaps more, the Westminster Assembly observed in 1657 that the commentaries customarily increased the cloud of obscurity they had hoped to remove. ³

Scholars differ widely on the structure of the Song, its unity or lack of it, the nature of its metaphors, and the nature of the love extolled by the Song. Probably no other book of the Bible has such a variegated tapestry of interpretation. Many evangelical scholars interpret the Song of Songs as a lyric poem, which has both unity and logical progression. The major sections of the Song deal with courtship (1:2-3:5), a wedding (3:6-5:1), and maturation in marriage (5:2-8:4). The Song concludes with a climactic statement about the nature of love (8:5-7) and an epilogue explaining how the love of the couple in the Song began (8:8-14).

There are those who feel that this lyric poem deals only with the subject of Biblical lovemaking, and a number of books focus

on this aspect. ⁴ The love relationship between a man and a woman - the courtship, the wedding night, and the subsequent sexual adjustments of the young couple - are all fruitfully treated. So explicit are these aspects that because of its erotic content, the rabbis forbade the book to be read by anyone under the age of 30. Indeed, of all the many books on marriage that are available in Christian and secular bookstores, none of them can possibly improve on the Biblical teaching found in this Song of Songs. Here is romantic love for married couples that exceeds our greatest dreams and expectations. Here is a manual on sex that beats all secular viewpoints on how a man and a woman should make love.

There is no way to escape the fact that this book is quite sensual. Glickman summarized it this way:

Sensuous love with erotic overtones is God's intent for the marriage relationship. The distortion of that relationship has no doubt abased this dimension of life, but that does not justify placing such experience - or Scripture's Song about it - into the inactive file of living. ⁵

The secular world has drowned us with its encouragements toward illicit affairs, easy divorce, the glories of promiscuity and joys of adulterous relationships. While critical of Christian viewpoints, it has done nothing to improve our marriages or satisfy the longings of our hearts. The exploitation of sex - and the disavowal of marriage and the family itself in our culture - has sown the wind and we now are reaping the whirlwind.

Is it Inspired?

Rabbi Akiba, the leading rabbi of the Bar Kocchba revolt (132-135 A.D.) is quoted in the Mishnah:

In the entire world there is nothing to equal the day on which the Song of Songs was given to Israel. All the writings are holy, but the Song of Songs is most Holy.⁶

(Due to his support, all questions about the place of the Song of Songs in the canon of the Scriptures were silenced.)

This book is inspired; it was part of the Scriptures when Jesus Christ was here on the earth. He put His imprimatur on the entire volume when He said, "The Scripture cannot be broken." (John 10:35). Some say that it is not quoted in the New Testament, yet there are fragments everywhere. 7 It is an extremely difficult book to teach because it is so personal. It needs to be. And like a diamond, it has many facets, and each one reveals a unique beauty.

King Solomon

As Israel's third king, Solomon ruled from 971 to 931 B.C. Solomon was perhaps more gifted with literary skill than any other king of Israel for he wrote 3,000 proverbs and 1,005 songs.⁸ It is appropriate that a subject as wonderful as romantic love is described in sublime language by a competent human author, writing of course under the Holy Spirit's inspiration. Interestingly, of the more than 1,000 songs Solomon wrote, only this one was designed by God to be included in the Biblical canon. What is the historical narrative underlying the opera?

Two, or a Triangle?

A key factor, even among those who take the text quite literally, is whether there are two or three characters in the book. Over 100 years ago, Ewald, the great German critic - who has been called the father of "higher" criticism - suggested a triangular view: a young shepherdess, in love with a shepherd, who was abducted by King Solomon. He vainly attempted to woo her away from her lover and eventually set her free to return to him.

This view has been accepted among some scholars, but it would lower the role of Solomon in the piece. Also, this view would dismiss some of the most lovely and tender passages of this little book as mere seduction instead of sincere and holy love. Cynicism would thus replace the very passages that have thrilled readers through the centuries. It reduces the erotic scenes to premarital lust rather than the beauty of sexual relations within marriage.

The Story Behind the Opera

In the mountain district of Ephraim, King Solomon had a vineyard, and he let it out to an Ephraimite family as keepers. The husband and father were apparently passed away, but there was a mother and at least two sons and two daughters. The older daughter, called the Shulamite,¹⁰ is the "Cinderella" of the piece. Her brothers did not appreciate her and foisted hard tasks upon her. She had no opportunity to look after herself. She's sunburned but naturally comely. One day she encounters a handsome stranger-shepherd, who views her as without blemish. Friendship ripens to affection, and finally, love. He promises to return and make her his bride. Her brothers, skeptical, regard her as being deceived by this stranger. He is gone a long time. She would dream of him in the darkness; she trusted him. Finally, a glorious cavalcade arrives, and the attendants announce, "The King has sent for you." In obedience, she responds. When she looks into the face of the King, behold the King was the very shepherd who had won her heart: "I am my beloved's, and his desire is toward me."

This appears consistent to the Biblical presentation - from Genesis to Revelation - of the Shepherd who came from heaven's highest glory down to this dark world that He might woo and win a bride for Himself. He went away, but He said, "I will come again, and receive you unto Myself."

Abishag's Role?

Some suspect that Abishag is in view here. Abishag was a beautiful young woman who spent her youth working in the fields and vineyards who was selected to lie beside the elderly King David and serve his needs during his dying years. She came from an area called Shunam, presumably in the Galilee. (The text is clear that her virginity was not taken away by the elderly King David.¹¹ Her ministry to him was completely a matter of physical care, not sexual pleasure.) Solomon, part of the household at that time, became deeply attached to her. When his brother Adonijah tried to get his mother's approval for taking Abishag to wife (since

he lost the kingdom to Solomon), Solomon was enraged and had Benaiah his executioner kill Adonijah.¹² Abishag was not a lady of the courts. She worked in the fields under the hot sun and was not used to expensive clothes and the exotics of the nobility. But she was also a natural beauty (like my Nan!).

This book is intended to improve dying or empty, boring marriages; to increase your love for your spouse; and, to illuminate true sexual and romantic understanding...but there's more.

Allegorical Views

Jewish tradition (the Mishnah, the Talmud, and the Targum) viewed the book as an allegorical picture of the love of God for Israel. ¹³ Church leaders, including Hypolytus, Origen, and Jerome, have viewed the book as an allegory of Christ's love for His bride, the Church. ¹⁴ John the Baptist, the last of the Old Testament prophets, recognized Christ as the Bridegroom, ¹⁵ as Christ Himself also claimed. ¹⁶ Paul goes even further. ¹⁷ It is interesting that God always seems to use the marriage as the idiom of intimacy with Himself, from Adam's love for Eve, Boaz's role in taking Ruth as a Gentile bride, Hosea's taking unfaithful Gomer, et al. (It is also interesting that in each "type" of Gentile bride in the Scripture, there is never any death recorded.)¹⁸ It is also significant that in this most intimate of books, there are lessons that go far beyond the art of lovemaking itself!

This article was originally published in the January 2001 Personal Update NewsJournal.

Footnotes

1. Forty-seven of which appear only in this book.
2. 1 Kings 11:1-4.
3. S. Craig Glickman, *A Song for Lovers*, p.173.
4. Fruchtenbaum, Hocking, et al.
5. Glickman, *A Song for Lovers*, p.9
6. Mishnah Yadaim 3:5.
7. "The well of living water" (Jn 4); "the veiled woman" (1 Cor 11); "the precious fruit" (1 Cor 13:8); "the spotless bride" (Eph 5:27); "unquenchable love" (1 Cor 13:8); "love strong as death" (Jn 15:13); "ointment poured forth" (Jn 12:3); "draw me" (Jn 6:44); "the Shepherd leading His flock" (Jn 10:4, 5, 27); "fruits of righteousness" (Phil 1:11).
8. 1 Kings 4:32.
9. Song of Songs 8:11.
10. Shulamite in Hebrew is merely the feminine form of the masculine name of Solomon. The story is of "Mr. and Mrs. Solomon."
11. 1 Kings 1:4.
12. 1 Kings 2:21-25.
13. Israel is, indeed, portrayed as the "wife" of Yahweh in Hosea, Ezekiel, et al. Cf. Isa 49:18; 61:10; 62:5; Joel 2:16.
14. So H.A. Ironside, *Hudson Taylor, et al.*
15. John 3:29.
16. Matthew 9:15.
17. Ephesians 5:22-32.
18. Tamar (Canaanite); Rahab (Amorite); Ruth (Moabite); Bathsheba (Hittite); Asenath (Egyptian).

SS 1:1 Solomon's Song of Songs.

SS 1:2 Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth--
for your love is more delightful than wine.

SS 1:3 Pleasing is the fragrance of your perfumes;
your name is like perfume poured out.
No wonder the maidens love you!

SS 1:4 Take me away with you--let us hurry!
Let the king bring me into his chambers.
We rejoice and delight in you;
we will praise your love more than wine.

How right they are to adore you!

SS 1:5 Dark am I, yet lovely,
O daughters of Jerusalem,
dark like the tents of Kedar,
like the tent curtains of Solomon.

SS 1:6 Do not stare at me because I am dark,
because I am darkened by the sun.
My mother's sons were angry with me
and made me take care of the vineyards;
my own vineyard I have neglected.

SS 1:7 Tell me, you whom I love, where you graze your flock
and where you rest your sheep at midday.
Why should I be like a veiled woman
beside the flocks of your friends?

SS 1:8 If you do not know, most beautiful of women,
follow the tracks of the sheep
and graze your young goats
by the tents of the shepherds.

SS 1:9 I liken you, my darling, to a mare
harnessed to one of the chariots of Pharaoh.

SS 1:10 Your cheeks are beautiful with earrings,
your neck with strings of jewels.

SS 1:11 We will make you earrings of gold,
studded with silver.

- SS 1:12 While the king was at his table,
my perfume spread its fragrance.
- SS 1:13 My lover is to me a sachet of myrrh
resting between my breasts.
- SS 1:14 My lover is to me a cluster of henna blossoms
from the vineyards of En Gedi.
- SS 1:15 How beautiful you are, my darling!
Oh, how beautiful!
Your eyes are doves.
- SS 1:16 How handsome you are, my lover!
Oh, how charming!
And our bed is verdant.
- SS 1:17 The beams of our house are cedars;
our rafters are firs.
- SS 2:1 I am a rose of Sharon,
a lily of the valleys.
- SS 2:2 Like a lily among thorns
is my darling among the maidens.
- SS 2:3 Like an apple tree among the trees of the forest
is my lover among the young men.
I delight to sit in his shade,
and his fruit is sweet to my taste.
- SS 2:4 He has taken me to the banquet hall,
and his banner over me is love.
- SS 2:5 Strengthen me with raisins,
refresh me with apples,
for I am faint with love.
- SS 2:6 His left arm is under my head,
and his right arm embraces me.
- SS 2:7 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.

SS 2:8 Listen! My lover!

Look! Here he comes,
leaping across the mountains,
bounding over the hills.

SS 2:9 My lover is like a gazelle or a young stag.

Look! There he stands behind our wall,
gazing through the windows,
peering through the lattice.

SS 2:10 My lover spoke and said to me,

"Arise, my darling,
my beautiful one, and come with me.

SS 2:11 See! The winter is past;

the rains are over and gone.

SS 2:12 Flowers appear on the earth;

the season of singing has come,
the cooing of doves
is heard in our land.

SS 2:13 The fig tree forms its early fruit;

the blossoming vines spread their fragrance.
Arise, come, my darling;
my beautiful one, come with me."

SS 2:14 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.

SS 2:15 Catch for us the foxes,

the little foxes
that ruin the vineyards,
our vineyards that are in bloom.

SS 2:16 My lover is mine and I am his;

he browses among the lilies.

SS 2:17 Until the day breaks

and the shadows flee,
turn, my lover,
and be like a gazelle

or like a young stag
on the rugged hills.

SS 3:1 All night long on my bed
I looked for the one my heart loves;
I looked for him but did not find him.

SS 3:2 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.

SS 3:3 The watchmen found me
as they made their rounds in the city.
"Have you seen the one my heart loves?"

SS 3:4 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.

SS 3:5 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.

SS 3:6 Who is this coming up from the desert
like a column of smoke,
perfumed with myrrh and incense
made from all the spices of the merchant?

SS 3:7 Look! It is Solomon's carriage,
escorted by sixty warriors,
the noblest of Israel,

SS 3:8 all of them wearing the sword,
all experienced in battle,
each with his sword at his side,
prepared for the terrors of the night.

SS 3:9 King Solomon made for himself the carriage;
he made it of wood from Lebanon.

SS 3:10 Its posts he made of silver,
its base of gold.

Its seat was upholstered with purple,
its interior lovingly inlaid
by the daughters of Jerusalem.

SS 3:11 Come out, you daughters of Zion,
and look at King Solomon wearing the crown,
the crown with which his mother crowned him
on the day of his wedding,
the day his heart rejoiced.

SS 4:1 How beautiful you are, my darling!
Oh, how beautiful!
Your eyes behind your veil are doves.
Your hair is like a flock of goats
descending from Mount Gilead.

SS 4:2 Your teeth are like a flock of sheep just shorn,
coming up from the washing.
Each has its twin;
not one of them is alone.

SS 4:3 Your lips are like a scarlet ribbon;
your mouth is lovely.
Your temples behind your veil
are like the halves of a pomegranate.

SS 4:4 Your neck is like the tower of David,
built with elegance;
on it hang a thousand shields,
all of them shields of warriors.

SS 4:5 Your two breasts are like two fawns,
like twin fawns of a gazelle
that browse among the lilies.

SS 4:6 Until the day breaks
and the shadows flee,
I will go to the mountain of myrrh
and to the hill of incense

SS 4:7 All beautiful you are, my darling;
there is no flaw in you.

SS 4:8 Come with me from Lebanon, my bride,
come with me from Lebanon.
Descend from the crest of Amana,

from the top of Senir, the summit of Hermon,
 from the lions' dens
 and the mountain haunts of the leopards.

SS 4:9 You have stolen my heart, my sister, my bride;
 you have stolen my heart
 with one glance of your eyes,
 with one jewel of your necklace.

SS 4:10 How delightful is your love, my sister, my bride!
 How much more pleasing is your love than wine,
 and the fragrance of your perfume than any spice!

SS 4:11 Your lips drop sweetness as the honeycomb, my bride;
 milk and honey are under your tongue.
 The fragrance of your garments is like that of Lebanon.

SS 4:12 You are a garden locked up, my sister, my bride;
 you are a spring enclosed, a sealed fountain.

SS 4:13 Your plants are an orchard of pomegranates
 with choice fruits,
 with henna and nard,

SS 4:14 nard and saffron,
 calamus and cinnamon,
 with every kind of incense tree,
 with myrrh and aloes
 and all the finest spices.

SS 4:15 You are a garden fountain,
 a well of flowing water
 streaming down from Lebanon.

SS 4:16 Awake, north wind,
 and come, south wind!
 Blow on my garden,
 that its fragrance may spread abroad.
 Let my lover come into his garden
 and taste its choice fruits.

SS 5:1 I have come into my garden, my sister, my bride;
 I have gathered my myrrh with my spice.
 I have eaten my honeycomb and my honey;
 I have drunk my wine and my milk.

Eat, O friends, and drink;
 drink your fill, O lovers.

SS 5:2 I slept but my heart was awake.
 Listen! My lover is knocking:
 "Open to me, my sister, my darling,
 my dove, my flawless one.
 My head is drenched with dew,
 my hair with the dampness of the night."

SS 5:3 I have taken off my robe--
 must I put it on again?
 I have washed my feet--
 must I soil them again?

SS 5:4 My lover thrust his hand through the latch-opening;
 my heart began to pound for him.

SS 5:5 I arose to open for my lover,
 and my hands dripped with myrrh,
 my fingers with flowing myrrh,
 on the handles of the lock.

SS 5:6 I opened for my lover,
 but my lover had left; he was gone.
 My heart sank at his departure.
 I looked for him but did not find him.
 I called him but he did not answer.

SS 5:7 The watchmen found me
 as they made their rounds in the city.
 They beat me, they bruised me;
 they took away my cloak,
 those watchmen of the walls!

SS 5:8 O daughters of Jerusalem, I charge you--
 if you find my lover,
 what will you tell him?
 Tell him I am faint with love.

SS 5:9 How is your beloved better than others,
 most beautiful of women?
 How is your beloved better than others,
 that you charge us so?

SS 5:10 My lover is radiant and ruddy,

outstanding among ten thousand.

SS 5:11 His head is purest gold;
his hair is wavy
and black as a raven.

SS 5:12 His eyes are like doves
by the water streams,
washed in milk,
mounted like jewels.

SS 5:13 His cheeks are like beds of spice
yielding perfume.
His lips are like lilies
dripping with myrrh.

SS 5:14 His arms are rods of gold
set with chrysolite.
His body is like polished ivory
decorated with sapphires.

SS 5:15 His legs are pillars of marble
set on bases of pure gold.
His appearance is like Lebanon,
choice as its cedars.

SS 5:16 His mouth is sweetness itself;
he is altogether lovely.
This is my lover, this my friend,
O daughters of Jerusalem.

SS 6:1 Where has your lover gone,
most beautiful of women?
Which way did your lover turn,
that we may look for him with you?

SS 6:2 My lover has gone down to his garden,
to the beds of spices,
to browse in the gardens
and to gather lilies.

SS 6:3 I am my lover's and my lover is mine;
he browses among the lilies.

SS 6:4 You are beautiful, my darling, as Tirzah,
lovely as Jerusalem,

majestic as troops with banners.

SS 6:5 Turn your eyes from me;
they overwhelm me.
Your hair is like a flock of goats
descending from Gilead.

SS 6:6 Your teeth are like a flock of sheep
coming up from the washing.
Each has its twin,
not one of them is alone.

SS 6:7 Your temples behind your veil
are like the halves of a pomegranate.

SS 6:8 Sixty queens there may be,
and eighty concubines,
and virgins beyond number;

SS 6:9 but my dove, my perfect one, is unique,
the only daughter of her mother,
the favorite of the one who bore her.
The maidens saw her and called her blessed;
the queens and concubines praised her.

SS 6:10 Who is this that appears like the dawn,
fair as the moon, bright as the sun,
majestic as the stars in procession?

SS 6:11 I went down to the grove of nut trees
to look at the new growth in the valley,
to see if the vines had budded
or the pomegranates were in bloom.

SS 6:12 Before I realized it,
my desire set me among the royal chariots of my people.

SS 6:13 Come back, come back, O Shulammite;
come back, come back, that we may gaze on you!

Why would you gaze on the Shulammite
as on the dance of Mahanaim?

SS 7:1 How beautiful your sandaled feet,
O prince's daughter!
Your graceful legs are like jewels,

the work of a craftsman's hands.

SS 7:2 Your navel is a rounded goblet
that never lacks blended wine.
Your waist is a mound of wheat
encircled by lilies.

SS 7:3 Your breasts are like two fawns,
twins of a gazelle.

SS 7:4 Your neck is like an ivory tower.
Your eyes are the pools of Heshbon
by the gate of Bath Rabbim.
Your nose is like the tower of Lebanon
looking toward Damascus.

SS 7:5 Your head crowns you like Mount Carmel.
Your hair is like royal tapestry;
the king is held captive by its tresses.

SS 7:6 How beautiful you are and how pleasing,
O love, with your delights!

SS 7:7 Your stature is like that of the palm,
and your breasts like clusters of fruit.

SS 7:8 I said, "I will climb the palm tree;
I will take hold of its fruit."
May your breasts be like the clusters of the vine,
the fragrance of your breath like apples,

SS 7:9 and your mouth like the best wine.

May the wine go straight to my lover,
flowing gently over lips and teeth.

SS 7:10 I belong to my lover,
and his desire is for me.

SS 7:11 Come, my lover, let us go to the countryside,
let us spend the night in the villages.

SS 7:12 Let us go early to the vineyards
to see if the vines have budded,
if their blossoms have opened,
and if the pomegranates are in bloom--

there I will give you my love.

SS 7:13 The mandrakes send out their fragrance,
and at our door is every delicacy,
both new and old,
that I have stored up for you, my lover.

SS 8:1 If only you were to me like a brother,
who was nursed at my mother's breasts!
Then, if I found you outside,
I would kiss you,
and no one would despise me.

SS 8:2 I would lead you
and bring you to my mother's house--
she who has taught me.
I would give you spiced wine to drink,
the nectar of my pomegranates.

SS 8:3 His left arm is under my head
and his right arm embraces me.

SS 8:4 Daughters of Jerusalem, I charge you:
Do not arouse or awaken love
until it so desires.

SS 8:5 Who is this coming up from the desert
leaning on her lover?

Under the apple tree I roused you;
there your mother conceived you,
there she who was in labor gave you birth.

SS 8:6 Place me like a seal over your heart,
like a seal on your arm;
for love is as strong as death,
its jealousy unyielding as the grave.
It burns like blazing fire,
like a mighty flame.

SS 8:7 Many waters cannot quench love;
rivers cannot wash it away.
If one were to give
all the wealth of his house for love,
it would be utterly scorned.

SS 8:8 We have a young sister,
and her breasts are not yet grown.
What shall we do for our sister
for the day she is spoken for?

SS 8:9 If she is a wall,
we will build towers of silver on her.
If she is a door,
we will enclose her with panels of cedar.

SS 8:10 I am a wall,
and my breasts are like towers.
Thus I have become in his eyes
like one bringing contentment.

SS 8:11 Solomon had a vineyard in Baal Hamon;
he let out his vineyard to tenants.
Each was to bring for its fruit
a thousand shekels of silver.

SS 8:12 But my own vineyard is mine to give;
the thousand shekels are for you, O Solomon,
and two hundred are for those who tend its fruit.

SS 8:13 You who dwell in the gardens
with friends in attendance,
let me hear your voice!

SS 8:14 Come away, my lover,
and be like a gazelle
or like a young stag
on the spice-laden mountains.

Color Me Meaningful

A fresh approach
to studying the Bible

"Imagine yourself on a cold day outside a large window. The heat of the room within has steamed up the window, and as you come close, you realize that someone has written with his finger on the inside of the window. You stand there reading what has been printed. Your eyes are focused on the writing. But suddenly you become aware that you can see through the writing to the room beyond, and a person, presumably the writer, is standing immediately behind the window. Your sudden change of attitude is something like what happens as God confronts us with his living presence when we thought we were just looking at the words of Scripture." ¶ When I first read the above paragraph in Donald Mostrom's "The Dynamics of Intimacy with God" (Tyndale), I got depressed. Mostrom made

studying the Bible sound poetic. But for me it was boring.

Do you find studying the Bible a drag? I have always had a hard time getting motivated to study that book—one-thousand-plus pages of unpronounceable names and mind-bending concepts that I'm supposed to tackle first thing in the morning!

But my attitude toward the Bible changed after my friend Martha told me about manuscript study.

When I first heard the phrase "manuscript study," I imagined six old men hunched over brown, torn scrolls in dimly lit rooms. But Martha wasn't old, nor male, and her Ephesians manuscript was marked with a jumble of yellow, blue, orange and fluorescent-green highlights. Even more unusual—Martha was enthusiastic about Bible study. She had actually *enjoyed* doing a manuscript

Bible study at a camp she had attended.

Double-minded

Too often we approach Scripture as a dry textbook we dread studying—mainly because the way we study the Bible isn't very productive or thrilling. We usually cram a chapter or so at a time, hoping the major ideas will somehow stick with us.

Most of us have understood the place of Scripture in the Christian faith without understanding its place in our day-to-day lives. We need to experience God speaking to us through his living, powerful and active Word. In John 1 we find that the Word is God (v. 1) and that "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (v. 14 RSV). Hebrews 4:12 affirms "the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword . . . it judges the thoughts and atti-

tudes of the heart." And Isaiah 55:10-11 says that as rain and snow bring water and bear fruit, "so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire."

For many of us, however, the Bible has lost this vitality. In his book *The Pursuit of God* (Revell), A. W. Tozer describes this malaise: "[Christians] may admit that they should accept the Bible as the Word of God, and they may try to think of it as such, but they find it impossible to believe that the words there on the page are actually for them. A man may say, 'These words are addressed to me,' and yet in his heart not feel and know that they are. He is the victim of a divided psychology."

For me, manuscript study was a fresh, creative approach that made Scripture come to life. Manuscript Bible study has helped

Bob Powell

me and others shed preconceived notions—and often be gripped by the big picture behind specific passages for the first time.

The A-Team

Manuscript study can be done on your own, but for best results (and more fun) do it with another person or in a group. You can do manuscript study on a weekly basis, at an all-day meeting or at a weekend retreat—whenever you have lots of time to interact with the text.

After you find others who want to study the Bible, arrange a time to meet, pick the book or section of a book you want to study (say, all of Habakkuk, Philippians, Jonah or the first eight chapters of Mark), and decide how much you want to cover each time. Six to eight people, for example, could tackle Habakkuk in a six-hour session on a Saturday, or the first eight chapters of Mark weekly during a quarter.

The Right Stuff

After getting your team together, equip them with:

- Wide-margin, double-spaced, typed manuscripts of the biblical book or section *without chapter and verse markings, paragraphs, special beadings or footnotes*. I recommend the Revised Standard Version because it's a fairly literal translation of the original text. (If you don't want to type it all yourself, you can get prepared copies for a minimal fee by writing IVCF Manuscript Service, P.O. Box 40250, Pasadena, CA 91104-7250 or calling (818) 797-3118.

- Colored pencils and markers. Each person should have at least seven different colors.

- Dictionary.
- Bible dictionary. (Recommended: *The New Bible Dictionary* [Eerdmans])
- Analytical Concordance. (Recommended: *Young's* [Thomas Nelson])
- Old Testament.
- Do *not* use Bible commentaries.

Digging In

Your first meeting will be structured differently from your subsequent meetings. During your first time together you will look for the overall theme of the entire text, and then divide the text into sections for study. Your leader may have done this for the group already. If not, then:

- Get an overview of the entire text by reading straight through it.
- Skim the text and create sections based on changes in setting, story, ideas, etc. (Remember that these divisions are tentative. Further study might reveal other ways

to divide the text.) If your sections are too long, simply divide them again.

- Title your sections.
- On the margins or on a separate piece of paper write down any broad questions that surface (e.g., "Why is Mark such an action-oriented Gospel?")
- Come to an agreement on what your sections are going to be and have someone record the different questions people have come up with.

In your following meetings, follow this basic structure: Focus on one preselected section each time. Spend thirty to forty-five minutes in individual study and the same amount in large group discussion. If you're at a retreat with more than ten people, break up into groups of four or five after individual study. That way everyone will have a chance to share observations, correct conclusions and focus attention on questions raised in the section before moving on to the large group discussion.

There are many variations on how to do what comes next, so don't feel bound to these word-for-word instructions. The steps described below are not in consecutive order; many will happen simultaneously.

During the individual study time:

1. Look at the big picture.

Apply the same steps outlined above to the smaller section you're working with. This time create and title paragraphs within the section. How does one paragraph or story within the section flow into another?

2. Focus on the details.

Look for and write down:

- repeated words and ideas
- repeated themes ("the power of God," "relationships among believers," "suffering," etc.)
- contrasts
- similes
- metaphors
- mood
- key words such as "therefore," "but," "if . . . then," "because"
- setting of writing or event
- time of day, month or year
- characters
- cause and effect
- who is speaking to whom
- figures of speech

When words, places, people's identities or customs are unclear, consult your Bible dictionary.

Next, assign a particular color to each theme or type of detail and highlight words and phrases accordingly as you go through the text one more time.

Strange Questions

So far so good. What next?

- Keep track of the questions each section raises. If something seems strange, jot it down. (In Mark 1:6, for example, you may read that John the Baptist wore "a leather girdle around his waist, and ate locusts and wild honey" [RSV] and wonder why the author decided to tell those details and skip Jesus' first thirty years entirely.)

- Make connections. How does each section's message fit with the message of the overall text? Does one section answer questions raised in other sections? You'll feel your pulse quickening as things start to come together.

- Ask yourself what ties different stories together. In Mark 5 the story of Jairus's daughter is interrupted by the story of the hemorrhaging woman. Why? In this same chapter Mark tells the story of the demoniac possessed by Legion; in the chapter before he tells the story of the storm at sea. What links did the writer see between these stories? Feel free to draw arrows and lines between related items.

- Pull back. What emerges as the main message in the section you have just studied? How does this fit with the main theme of the whole manuscript you're studying? Here's where you work through tensions between the parts and the whole.

- Finally, how can you apply what you have learned to your daily life? (You might decide to show more compassion toward those around you, for example, or decide to learn how to pray for healing.)

Striking It Rich

Bring your multicolored marked-up manuscript to your group discussion and, with the help of a discussion leader, share your discoveries. The Scriptures yield their greatest treasures in the Christian community, who can stimulate and check the manuscript study process.

That about sums it up. Manuscript study is rewarding and exciting. But don't get sidetracked with the method. Manuscript Bible study only helps us understand Scripture and, more importantly, apply it to our lives. As Paul Byer, the mind behind manuscript Bible study, wrote, "Our understanding of Scripture will be opened, or blocked, more by our obedience than by our study methods. The goal then of every Bible study is to act on what we hear."

Manuscript study can help you see behind the writing on the frosty window pane to the author—the living God. To see him is to be changed forever. ■

BOB POWELL staffs the Vanderbilt and Tennessee Tech I-V chapters when not playing war games on his MacIntosh computer.

and make notes. I'll

- jot down cross-references that come to mind

- write in the margin any observations. For example, where Paul wrote, "I am not ashamed, because I know whom I have believed," I noted in the margin: "Paul's fearlessness isn't the result of confidence in himself but, rather, confidence in Christ. The cure for Timothy's spirit of timidity—and mine—is a focus on my all-powerful Savior."

- look up the definitions of any words that are new to me or unclear

- draw arrows to connect related ideas

- write in the margin any questions I have. For example, I wanted to know who Jannes and Jambres were—Paul spoke of them as opposing Moses. Later, I found the answer in Ex. 7:11—they were Pharaoh's magicians. I might also ask of a certain sentence, "What does this mean?" I tackle those questions in step four.

4. By now, I've got a pretty good grip on 2 Timothy. At this stage, I like to read a commentary or check a few reference books for background information on the book—cultural and historical setting, for example. I purposely leave the commentaries and references alone until this point. I don't want them to *replace* my personal study, but I have found that they can greatly *enhance* it once I've already gleaned what I can. I write in the margins any insights I gain from this research. I also look for and record any answers to my "What does this mean" questions.

5. I also found it helpful with 2 Timothy to imagine myself writing the letter and to decide where I would put paragraph breaks. Sometimes we are so locked in to chapter and verse divisions that we miss the crucial flow of thought from the end of one chapter to the beginning of another. This process can reveal a flow and relationship of ideas and principles that I've missed in the past.

6. In the end, the purpose of all this coloring and "arrowing" and underlining is change. My final question becomes, "Lord, how do You want me to respond to this passage?" I might know the answer, having spent days, weeks, maybe months on the study. I might need to let the study roll around in my head and heart for a few more days in order to really discern what God is saying to me. Once I know, I write it down. Then I tell a friend what God has shown me—that's for accountability. My application may require a change in behavior. It may require taking a step of faith—like inviting my neighbor to church. Perhaps God will tell me, "Write a letter to so-and-so and encourage her, as Paul did Timothy."

Versatile and Valuable

As I mentioned in the beginning, I've used manuscript studies for personal study and also in small groups. I've loved discovering the creative ways in which my small-group friends have marked their manuscripts. No two studies are ever alike.

One helpful hint for using this method in small groups: Number the lines on each page. Since you are working without chapter and verse numbers, you'll need some way to direct each other within the text.

Numbering each line accomplishes this.

I've done a lot of Bible studies in the past 20 years. The books of the Bible that I know most thoroughly and personally are those I've studied using the manuscript method. There is something about all that hands-on involvement with the text that deeply impresses it on your brain and in your heart. ♦

SUE KLINE is managing editor of Discipleship Journal and still hasn't outgrown her fascination with colored markers.

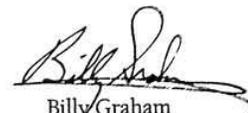
Too much information without formation! Formation (Gal 4:19)

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