

The Hunt

A married couple's guide to the Song of Solomon

תְּשׁוּקָה

In our previous study of Genesis 3, we learned about a particular Hebrew word, *teshuqah*, usually translated as a verb meaning "have desire for." *Teshuqah* appears only three times in the Bible. We see the meaning of this word most clearly in Genesis 4:7, where God warns Cain,

*"Sin is crouching at the door.
It has desire for you.
But you must rule over it."*

The word-picture here shows us a predator, an animal, ready to pounce on its prey, to overpower it, kill it, and eat it. Sin is the predator, and Cain is the prey. Sin will fully overpower Cain, take control of him, and ruin his life.

Back in Genesis 3:16 God gave a warning to Eve, using the same two verbs in the same grammatical construction:

*"You will have desire for your husband.
But he will rule over you."*

When we apply the word picture that we see in Genesis 4:7, the meaning of Genesis 3:16 becomes clear. The wife's "desire" to overpower and control her husband is a curse of sin on the marriage relationship. However, in this conflict the "prey" (husband) fights back and gets the upper hand, and the "predator" (wife) loses. (The cure for this curse is in Ephesians 5:21-33.)

The third text in which the word *teshuqah* appears is different than these two verses in Genesis. It is in Bible's sensuous love poem, the Song of Solomon:

*"I am my beloved's,
and he has desire for me." (Song of Solomon 7:10)*

Here we have what may appear to be a translation problem. Because two of the three texts which use this word *teshuqah* describe the marriage relationship (Genesis 3:16 and Song of Solomon 7:10), and the Song of Solomon gives the word a positive nuance, many modern English versions of the Bible mistranslate *teshuqah* in Genesis 3:16 as "have affection for." Even some Old Testament Hebrew-English dictionaries mistakenly offer "affection" as an acceptable translation for *teshuqah*. But when we read Genesis 3:16 in its context and compare it to Genesis 4:7, we see that Genesis 3:16 is describing a power struggle; it is not talking about "affection."

So what does *teshuqah* mean in the Song of Solomon? When we apply the picture of a predator desiring its prey, the meaning becomes clear. First, note the context. In the first 9 verses of Song of Solomon 7, the husband describes in glorious detail intimate parts of his wife's body.

Then she responds:

*"I am my beloved's,
and he has desire for me."*

Meaning: "My husband is the predator -- the hunter. And I am his prey. And I am very much enjoying the hunt." This is a playful use of *teshuqah*. And when we read the whole Song of Solomon with this picture in mind, we see that the theme throughout the Song is "the hunt."

After 30+ years of marriage, I think that I am finally starting to get it. My personal awakening on the importance of "the hunt" came during one of my frequent complaints that the buttons and button holes on my wife's pajamas are too small. They are difficult for me to manage.

"There is an easy fix for this," I suggested. "It's called 'Velcro.'"

"What!? And miss the fun of the chase?" she said with a smile.

Fun? or frustration? Translate the woman's "fun of the chase" into language a man can understand: What a man works for, he appreciates more. And she also appreciates it more.

All that romantic stuff our wives want us to do when we are *not* in bed is all part of the chase, the hunt. And that's why it turns her on. And that's why our sexual advances in bed without the hunt turn her off. For us men, getting naked together is the "main thing." For our wives, the hunt itself is the "main thing." The sooner we husbands understand this, the happier our wives will be. And as the old saying goes, "when Mama's happy, everyone's happy."

As we read through the *Song of Solomon*, we see that the hunt goes in both directions. He chases her, and she chases him. It appears that she is doing most of the chasing!

Chapter 1 (NIV)

(The woman)

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?

(Answer from either the man or friends)

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.

Chapter 2

(The woman)

- ¹ All night long on my bed
I looked for the one my heart loves;
I looked for him but did not find him.
- 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.
- ³ The watchmen found me
as they made their rounds in the city.
"Have you seen the one my heart loves?"
- 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.

While she chases him with her words and her feet, he chases her with his eyes.

4: 1-5 (The man)

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.
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.
Your lips are like a scarlet ribbon;
your mouth is lovely.
Your temples behind your veil
are like the halves of a pomegranate.
Your neck is like the tower of David,
built with elegance;
on it hang a thousand shields,
all of them shields of warriors.
Your two breasts are like two fawns,
like twin fawns of a gazelle
that browse among the lilies.

The last line, "browse among the lilies," will come up again. It will be helpful to remember what it signifies in this context.

The husband's description of his wife's physique gets stuck here for a while. Chapters 1 and 6 also have his short descriptions of his wife's face and hair. But there is much more that the man

wants to say about her. So in Chapter 7 he starts at the other end of her anatomy and works his way up.

7:1-9 (the man)

How beautiful your sandaled feet,
O prince's daughter!
Your graceful legs are like jewels,
the work of a craftsman's hands.
Your navel is a rounded goblet
that never lacks blended wine.
Your waist [or hips] is a mound of wheat
encircled by lilies.
Your breasts are like two fawns,
twins of a gazelle.
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.
Your head crowns you like Mount Carmel.
Your hair is like royal tapestry;
the king is held captive by its tresses.
How beautiful you are and how pleasing,
O love, with your delights!

At this point, the husband changes his hunting methods from using his **eyes** to using his **hands**, from enjoying the way she looks to enjoying the way she feels.

Your stature is like that of the palm,
and your breasts like clusters of fruit.
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,
and your mouth like the best wine.

Notice what most draws his attention. Men have not changed in 3000 years. (We will look more at what the Bible says about this later.)

It is in this context that the wife responds:

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

Remember that this word "desire" refers to the craving of a predator for its prey. She is using the expression playfully. She is enjoying the hunt.

Note that this phrase "I belong to my lover" (literal "I am my beloved's") does not imply ownership or domination. This same phrase appears twice previously in The Song as an expression of mutual love and total commitment.

2:16-17 (the woman)

My lover is mine and I am his;
he browses among the lilies.
Until the day breaks
and the shadows flee...

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

Some translations render this "he grazes his flocks among the lilies." A preceding verse tells us that the lilies are in a garden, which is not a suitable place for sheep to graze. When we remember how the husband used this phrase, we may guess that "he browses among the lilies" is more likely a metaphor for their physical intimacy. She is "the lilies."

What attracts the woman to her husband?

His kisses (the opening line of The Song.)

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

His reputation (his character)

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

His physique

5:10-16 (the woman)

My lover is radiant and ruddy,
outstanding among ten thousand.
His head is purest gold;
his hair is wavy
and black as a raven.
His eyes are like doves
by the water streams,
washed in milk,
mounted like jewels.
His cheeks are like beds of spice
yielding perfume.
His lips are like lilies
dripping with myrrh.
His arms [literally: hands] are rods of gold
set with chrysolite.

His body is like polished ivory
decorated with sapphires.
His legs are pillars of marble
set on bases of pure gold.
His appearance is like Lebanon,
choice as its cedars.
His mouth is sweetness itself;
he is altogether lovely.
This is my lover, this my friend,
O daughters of Jerusalem.

His touch

2:6 & 8:3 (the woman)

His left arm [literally: hand] is under my head,
and his right arm [hand] embraces me.

Husbands, note that the wife of the Song uses this sentence twice. So it must be important.

It is interesting to also note that both times she says this (and one other time when she says that she took her husband "to the room where my mother conceived me" ^{2:4}), she immediately cautions her single friends:

2:6 & 8:3 (the woman)

Daughters of Jerusalem, I charge you:
Do not arouse or awaken love
until it so desires. [i.e. it is the right time]

Meaning: Single folks, wait for God to bring the right person at the right time in the right way. Don't risk messing up your lives and hearts by rushing into romance prematurely. (Unfortunately, some modern English versions mistranslate this: "Do not arouse or awaken my lover until he desires." -- which loses its original meaning and message.)

His career -- She mentions it frequently, although she resents his work related absences.

^{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?

Anticipation of his return

2:8-9 (the woman)

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

Time alone with him

2:10-13 (the woman)

My lover spoke and said to me,
 "Arise, my darling,
 my beautiful one, and come with me.
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."

7:11-12 (the woman)

Come, my lover, let us go to the countryside,
 let us spend the night in the villages.
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.

The wife associates her husband's invitations to dinner with physical intimacy. We wonder if her reference to dinner with him is simply a metaphor for sex.

1:12,13 (the woman)

While the king was at his table,
 my perfume spread its fragrance.
My lover is to me a sachet of myrrh
 resting between my breasts.

2:4-7 (the woman)

He has taken me to the banquet hall,
 and his banner over me is love...
His left arm is under my head,
 and his right arm embraces me.

8:2-4 (the woman)

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.

His left arm is under my head
and his right arm embraces me.

His voice, her voice

^{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,...

Some translations identify this speaker as the wife, others think it is the husband. It doesn't matter, because both often say they experience pleasure when they hear the voice of their lover. For the wife, the sound of her husband's voice signals his arrival. She hears him before she sees him. This anticipation increases her excitement.

^{2:8} Listen! My lover!
Look! Here he comes...

^{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."

Nowadays deaf lovers can generate the same excitement of anticipation by sending each other text messages on their wireless devices.

For the husband, the sound of joy and laughter in his wife's voice greatly encourages him. Again, deaf lovers can generate that same excitement with their eye contact.

Here is a suggestion for hearing couples. When you come home from your next anniversary date, sit together and read the Song of Solomon out loud. Husband, you read the man's lines (and also the friends lines). Wife, you read the woman's lines. If you don't make it all the way through the Song, that's okay. You can try again next year. (*Deaf couples, if you figure out a way to creatively use the Song of Solomon on a date, please let me know.*)

The hunt gone awry

Sometimes the hunt goes wrong. The husband and wife misunderstand each other, and by their reactions they hurt and get hurt.

^{5:2-8} (the woman)
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."

I have taken off my robe—
 must I put it on again?
 I have washed my feet—
 must I soil them again?
My lover thrust his hand through the latch-opening;
 my heart began to pound for him.
I arose to open for my lover,
 and my hands dripped with myrrh,
 my fingers with flowing myrrh,
 on the handles of the lock.
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.
The watchmen found me
 as they made their rounds in the city.
 They beat me, they bruised me;
 they took away my cloak [or veil],
 those watchmen of the walls!
O daughters of Jerusalem, I charge you—
 if you find my lover,
 what will you tell him?
 Tell him I am faint with love.

This "hunt" begins with the husband seeking to approach his wife at night while she is in bed. She needed him to court her in ways that makes her feel loved and appreciated *before bed*. However, He was not able to do this because of his work related absence. If he had been able to alert her in advance of his arrival, he would have experienced a very different reception. (In those days they did not have cell phones and pagers. Let us be thankful that we do -- and let us use them.)

The text does not explain the reason the husband gave up and left. Did he assume that she was not there? Or did he believe that she deliberately obstructed his approach? In either case, he became discouraged and withdrew. So she chased him. But in her pursuit, she took risks which jeopardized her safety. If they both had been patient and waited, this episode would have had a happy ending.

Her voice, his touch

Two "turn-ons" for affection -- her voice and his touch -- have something in common. They can both quickly become an irritation, a "turn-off." This happens when the flirtatious hunt of romance degenerates into the conflict that Genesis 3:16 describes.

When a man foolishly initiates physical contact with his wife while she harbors hurt and anger, he will sense her stiffening to his touch. She most certainly will not melt in his hands as he had hoped.

Similarly, the woman's voice can either capture her husband's heart with pleasant intonations, or her voice can have a similar effect as the sound of fingernails on a chalkboard when expressing negative emotions.

Proverbs 27: 15

A quarrelsome wife is like
a constant dripping on a rainy day.

(See also Proverbs 21:9, 19)

The key to healing which can bring their relationship out of Genesis 3 back into the Song of Solomon is found in Ephesians 5:21-33, as couples learn how to express mutual love, respect, and forgiveness in ways that are meaningful for each other. (I highly recommend Dr. Emerson Eggerichs' book *Love and Respect*, for its practical application and insights on Ephesians 5:33.) But this is only the first step. The couple must also deliberately resume the daily hunt ala' the Song of Solomon.

A woman's body and a man's eyes

The Song concludes with a reminder and warning that this romantic chase must be exclusively between husband and wife. The wife is aware that her husband's eyes could easily become distracted by another beautiful woman. She is deeply concerned that his thoughts are only for her.

8: 6-7 (the woman)

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.
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.

Simply because of the way men are wired, a husband's visual and mental attraction to his wife's body is not limited to his wife. This can be a real struggle for Christian men in today's culture. Men's eyes are assaulted by women on the internet, women in the community, and women in the church who are unaware that they are a stumbling block for their brothers in Christ by their wardrobe choices which carelessly expose their breasts. Women, you must understand this temptation for men does not diminish with age.

God has given Christian couples a powerful way to help husbands achieve victory in their mental struggles.

Proverbs 5:15-22

Drink water from your own cistern,
 running water from your own well.
Should your springs overflow in the streets,
 your streams of water in the public squares?
Let them be yours alone,
 never to be shared with strangers.
May your fountain be blessed,
 and may you rejoice in the wife of your youth.
A loving doe, a graceful deer—
 may her breasts satisfy you always,
 may you ever be captivated by her love.
Why be captivated, my son, by an adulteress?
 Why embrace the bosom of another man's wife?
For a man's ways are in full view of the LORD,
 and he examines all his paths.
The evil deeds of a wicked man ensnare him;
 the cords of his sin hold him fast.

Husbands, a daily morning dose of your wife's affection is a powerful antidote to the daily temptations to let your eyes and thoughts go places that violate your marriage covenant -- the covenant that you made with your wife, and with God. The more you fill your senses with your wife, the less room there will be in your mind or in your eyes for anyone else.

Proverbs 5: 18-19

May you rejoice in the wife of your youth...
 may her breasts satisfy you always,
 may you ever be captivated by her love.

A husband may answer, "When I try to touch my wife, she pushes me away." That may be because you are not doing the hunt in ways that she appreciates. The wife in the Song of Solomon has something to teach you about how to be tender toward your wife. You must win her heart before you can approach her body. For her, the hunt is not simply foreplay in bed. Talk with her, kiss her, and touch her throughout the day. Alert her to times that she can anticipate being alone with you and she will have your focused attention.

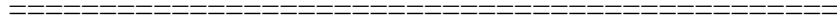
Wives, you can encourage your husband by also engaging in the hunt in ways that are meaningful to him. The old saying is true -- you can catch more flies with honey than with vinegar.

Men, even when you do everything right, there will be times in bed when your wife will have other things on her mind and will not be in the mood for sex. If you both can learn the joys of snuggling without expectations of getting naked, you both can pursue the hunt even in bed.

May God now help me practice what I teach. --RF

Proverbs 30: 18-19

There are three things that are too amazing for me,
four that I do not understand:
The way of an eagle in the sky,
the way of a snake on a rock,
the way of a ship on the high seas,
and the way of a man with a maiden.



For more insights and practical application of Song of Solomon on your marriage relationship, read *Kiss Me Like You Mean It* by Dr. David Clarke (Revell).