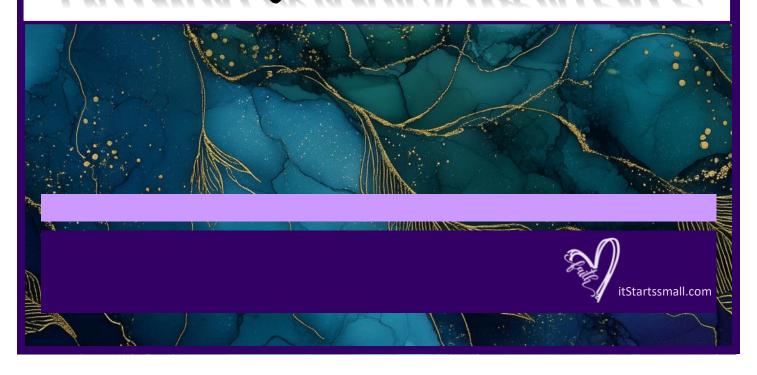


Maturity in

Intimacy and Obedience



INTRODUCTION

SOAP METHOD

SONG OF SOLOMON 5:2-6:3

- 1. THE FIERY TEST OF DELAY
- 2. THE HEART-WRENCHING PAIN OF MISSED MOMENTS
- 3. THE PIERCING PAIN THAT AWAKENS
- 4. THE VULNERABLE YET UNYIELDING PURSUIT
- 5. THE RESOUNDING VOICE OF WORSHIP
- 6. THE PROFOUND RESTORATION OF UNION
- 7. THE BOUNTIFUL FRUIT OF TESTED LOVE

This seven-day study delves into one of the most profound and tender movements in the Song of Solomon—the exhilarating testing of love through silence, delay, and surrender. When the bride hesitates, responding too slowly to her Beloved's call, she opens the door only to find Him gone, igniting a fervent quest filled with vulnerability, sorrow, and the passionate refinement of her desires. This study beckons you to reflect on the essence of loving Christ amid divine silence and absence. You'll explore the transformative journey of love, which matures not solely through passion and presence, but also through yearning, obedience, and the courage of costly trust. As you accompany the bride through her heart-wrenching experiences of rejection, pursuit, and eventual reunion, you will witness how God employs testing to deepen intimacy and prepare your heart for a sacred communion. Each day's discovery will reveal how surrender fosters growth, how delayed answers awaken profound hunger, and how even the wounds of love can transform into sacred spaces of awe and renewal.

How to use this Journal:

There are many study methods out there! I encourage you to search through them and find what motivates and encourages you the most. I like to use the S.O.A.P Method.

Scripture

Write out a verse or passage of scripture.

Observation What stood out to you about

this verse or scriptures?

Where there any commands or instructions?

Application How can you apply this

today to your life today?

How can you live in light of this truth?

Prayer

Write out a prayer. Ask the Lord to show you how to meditate and apply this truth to your life.

Other areas to consider:

- Author
- Audience
- Major Concept
- Theme
- **Event**
- Keywords and Definitions
- People
- Places
- When
- Where
- Who am I in this Verse?
- Where is God?
- What Is God Speaking?

Give yourself room to ponder and pray. Allow yourself time to listen for God to speak to you. Get creative! Draw, paint, make diagrams, whatever ignites your awe and wonder to studying God's Word!

Visit It Starts Small for more examples and in-depth study guide ideas! www.itstartssmall.com

Woman

² I was sleeping, but my heart was awake. A sound! My love was knocking!

Man

Open to me, my sister, my darling, my dove, my perfect one.

For my head is drenched with dew, my hair with droplets of the night.

Woman

I have taken off my clothing.
How can I put it back on?
I have washed my feet.
How can I get them dirty?

⁴ My love thrust his hand through the opening, and my feelings were stirred for him.

⁵ I rose to open for my love.
My hands dripped with myrrh, my fingers with flowing myrrh on the handles of the bolt.

⁶ I opened to my love, but my love had turned and gone away.

Notes:

Notes:

My heart sank because he had left.

I sought him, but did not find him.

I called him, but he did not answer.

The guards who go about the city found me.

They beat and wounded me;

they took my cloak from me—

the guardians of the walls.

Young women of Jerusalem, I charge you,

if you find my love,

tell him that I am lovesick.

Young Women

⁹ What makes the one you love better than another, most beautiful of women?
What makes him better than another, that you would give us this charge?

Woman

⁰ My love is fit and strong, notable among ten thousand. ¹¹ His head is purest gold. His hair is wavy and black as a raven. ¹² His eyes are like doves beside flowing streams,

Notes:

washed in milk and set like jewels. ¹³ His cheeks are like beds of spice, mounds of perfume. His lips are lilies, dripping with flowing myrrh. ¹⁴ His arms are rods of gold set with beryl. His body is an ivory panel covered with lapis lazuli. ¹⁵ His legs are alabaster pillars set on pedestals of pure gold. His presence is like Lebanon, as majestic as the cedars. ¹⁶ His mouth is sweetness. He is absolutely desirable. This is my love, and this is my friend, young women of Jerusalem.

Young Women

Where has your love gone, most beautiful of women?
Which way has he turned?
We will seek him with you.

Woman

² My love has gone down to his garden, to beds of spice, to feed in the gardens and gather lilies.

³ Lam my love's and my love is mine:

³ I am my love's and my love is mine; he feeds among the lilies.

Songs 5:2-6:3

Notes:

The Fiery Test of Delay Song of Solomon 3:6

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The Fiery Test of Delay

² I was sleeping, but my heart was awake. A sound! My love was knocking!

Man

Open to me, my sister, my darling, my dove, my perfect one.

For my head is drenched with dew, my hair with droplets of the night.

Songs 5:2

This verse bursts forth with a paradox - "I was sleeping, but my heart was awake." The bride finds herself in a tantalizing state of tension, caught between the embrace of slumber and the alertness of her spirit. Then, she hears His voice. The Beloved draws near, gently knocking, beckoning her with deeply affectionate words: "...my sister, my darling, my dove, my perfect one." This is no mere invitation; it is a sacred moment of divine visitation that stirs the soul. Instead of rushing to the door, the bride pauses, overwhelmed. This moment unveils a profound truth about intimacy with God - it is not always a comfortable journey. Sometimes, the invitation feels like a jarring interruption, disrupting our rhythm and comfort, igniting a holy yearning within.

²⁰ See! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me.

Revelation 3:20

This verse resonates profoundly. Jesus stands at the door, gently knocking, offering Himself not just as our Savior but as a cherished companion longing to dwell within us. However, the door can only be opened from the inside. He takes the first step, but it's up to us to respond. Theologically, this reflects the beauty of free will; God reaches out and invites us into a divine conversation, yet He will never impose Himself. He patiently awaits a willing bride. Love blossoms and matures when we consciously choose it—especially when it demands something from us—our time, our comfort, our pride, our very schedules.

Psychologically, a delayed response often uncovers our deepest priorities. When we hesitate to say yes to love, we reveal the truths that govern our hearts—fear, apathy, and the instinct to self-protect. God uses these pauses not to shame us but to illuminate those hidden attachments. Neuroscience teaches us that our brains are wired to resist discomfort, clinging to the familiar. Yet, true growth ignites when we defy that instinct, boldly opting for intimacy over inertia. The more we train ourselves to respond passionately to love's call, the more resilient and attuned we become to the profound depths of our relationships.

This moment in the book of Songs transcends mere failure; it is a potent experience of formation. The bride will eventually respond, though not immediately. In that precious delay, something sacred begins to unfold: a profound awakening to the true essence of being chosen, called, and invited into divine union with God—even amidst our weariness, indifference, or reluctance.

Journal Prompt:

- Have you ever sensed God calling you when it felt inconvenient or uncomfortable?
- What held you back from responding?

Practical Steps and Application:

- 1. Create intentional space in your day where God can speak.
- 2. Journal one area where you have hesitated to respond to God's invitation.
- 3. Pray for the Lord to open your ears to hear even when you would rather sleep.

Deeper Introspection:

Read Revelation 3:20.

²⁰ See! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me.

Revelation 3:20

The passage of Revelation 3:20, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me", is a personal invitation from Jesus to a lukewarm church (Laodicea) for restored

fellowship. It can be applied to both individual believers who have grown complacent and to those who have never fully embraced Christ.

Reflecting on your spiritual condition

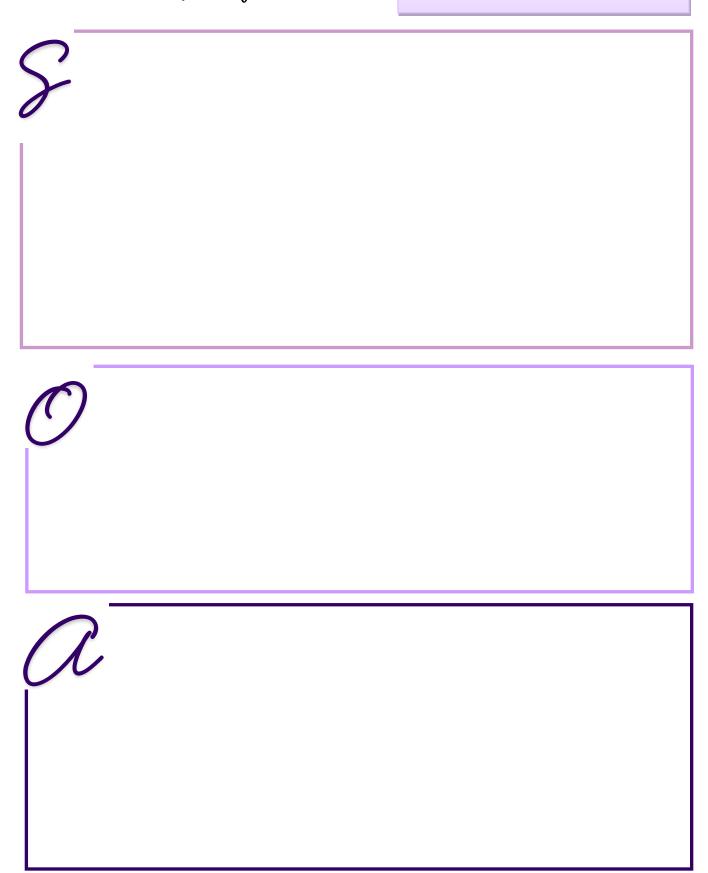
- Self-sufficiency vs. dependence: In Revelation 3:17, Jesus identifies the Laodicean church's prideful self-reliance, saying, "You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing". In what areas of your life have you started to rely on your own abilities or resources instead of depending on Jesus?
- Lukewarmness: The Laodiceans were condemned for being "neither hot nor cold" (Revelation 3:15). Write about a time when your spiritual life has felt lukewarm or indifferent. What caused this, and what steps can you take to rekindle your passion?
- Identifying the knock: How do you recognize Jesus's "knock" in your life? Is it a quiet prompting during prayer, a call to repentance after a sin, or a clear message from Scripture? Describe a recent time you heard his voice and your response.
- Opening the door: Revelation 3:20 emphasizes that opening the door is a choice. What fears, habits, or worldly distractions keep you from fully opening the door to Christ? How can you commit to consistently letting him in?

Deepening your fellowship with Christ

- The promise of fellowship: The verse ends with the promise, "I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me". A shared meal in ancient culture was a sign of close, intimate fellowship. What would it be like to have that close and personal meal with Jesus? What topics would you discuss?
- The purpose of dining: To "dine with him" suggests a continual, daily fellowship rather than a one-time event. How can you move beyond superficial prayers and cultivate a deeper, more intimate relationship with Jesus in your everyday life?
- Welcoming correction: Jesus tells the Laodiceans, "Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline" (Revelation 3:19). Write about a time when you received loving correction from God. Did you welcome it or resist it? What did you learn from the experience?

Unwillingness and rejection

- The rich young ruler (Matthew 19:16–22): This man came to Jesus asking about eternal life but was unwilling to give up his possessions to follow him. He "went away sorrowful" because he was unwilling to open the door and invite Jesus to transform his life fully. This demonstrates what happens when material wealth takes priority over a relationship with God.
- The parable of the sower (Luke 8:4–15): The seeds that fall among thorns represent those who hear the word but are "choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life" and fail to mature. This image directly relates to the Laodicean church, which was so distracted by its wealth that it crowded Jesus out.



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The Heart-Wrenching Pain of Missed Moments

³ I have taken off my clothing. How can I put it back on? I have washed my feet. How can I get them dirty? Songs 5:3

When the bride hears the Groom knocking, her response is a tantalizing hesitation, a flutter of uncertainty. She's already undressed, the allure of the night beckoning her to rest, yet her words spill forth, laced with an unexpected resistance: "How can I put it back on?" This moment unveils a profound truth – we often find ourselves resisting love when it nudges us from our cozy comforts. This verse eloquently captures the essence of spiritual delay, illustrating that there are seasons when God beckons us towards deeper obedience. Yet, at times, our immediate response is crafted by the routines we've settled into, the security we've built, or our instinct for self-preservation. The bride is not rejecting the Groom's love; she simply finds herself unprepared to embrace the beautiful cost of intimacy in that fleeting moment.

And don't grieve God's Holy Spirit. You were sealed by him for the day of redemption.

Ephesians 4:30

Paul's passionate exhortation compels us to recognize the importance of not grieving the Holy Spirit. God's nature is tender, relational, and profoundly responsive. When we delay our obedience, we can stifle His vibrant movement in our lives—not because He withdraws in anger, but because we become numb to His gentle voice. Theologically, this moment profoundly highlights the significance of our response. Love transcends mere affection; it demands action and commitment. God cherishes our freedom and fervently invites us to engage in daily communication. True, mature intimacy probes deeper, asking not only what feels good but also what authentic love necessitates.

Psychologically, avoidance serves as a shield for our hearts. We often hesitate to engage, gripped by the fear of vulnerability, the fear of relinquishing control, or the fear of stepping into the unknown. Yet, love is a powerful force that stretches us—inviting us to trust beyond the constraints of logic, to take leaps even when it feels inconvenient. Neuroscience reveals that emotional regulation and spiritual responsiveness flourish through

small, repeated acts of surrender. When we courageously affirm our yes to God—even amidst our resistance—we forge new pathways in our brains, making future acts of obedience not just easier, but an exhilarating expression of our true nature.

Though the bride delays, the story is far from over. This is not merely a tale of rejection; it is a narrative of exquisite refinement. Love waits—not as a form of punishment, but as a catalyst to awaken the deepest desires within our souls.

Journal Prompt:

- Have you felt resistent to God's prompting lately?
- What "robe" have you been unwilling to put back on?

Practical Steps and Application:

- 1. Identify one area of delayed obedience and commit it to God.
- 2. Ask yourself what comforts you are holding on to more tightly than Christ.
- 3. Write a prayer of surrender, even if t feels small or unfinished.

Deeper Introspection:

Read Ephesians 4:30.

³⁰ And don't grieve God's Holy Spirit. You were sealed by him for the day of redemption.

Ephesians 4:30

Ephesians 4:30 states, "And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption." To "grieve" the Holy Spirit means to cause the Spirit sorrow, distress, or pain. As a divine person who lives within believers, the Holy Spirit is sensitive to sin because he is holy and desires to make us holy. The verses that follow (Ephesians 4:31–32) list the specific behaviors that cause this grief, such as malice, anger, and unforgiveness.

Reflecting on your sin and its effects

• Awareness of the Spirit's presence: The Holy Spirit dwells within you to help you live a life that honors God. Have you been living with an awareness of his

- presence? What actions or attitudes might be causing him sorrow?
- The context of Ephesians 4: The verses immediately preceding and following Ephesians 4:30 define specific sins. Ask yourself:
- Lying (v. 25): "Have I been deceitful, even in small ways? In what relationships have I failed to be completely truthful?"
- Uncontrolled anger (v. 26): "Have I allowed anger to linger and harden my heart? How can I address this anger in a way that doesn't give the devil a foothold?"
- Unwholesome talk (v. 29): "What kind of words have I been using to tear others down instead of building them up? Am I using my speech to 'minister grace' to those around me?"
- Unforgiveness and bitterness (v. 31–32): "Is there someone I am struggling to forgive? What bitterness or malice am I holding on to that is blocking the work of the Spirit in my heart?"

Seeking healing and obedience

- The love in his grief: One commentary describes the Spirit's grief as "a sweet combination of anger and love," a disapproval wrapped in "undying care". How does it change your perspective to know that the Spirit is grieved out of love for you?
- Confession and repentance: The Bible says that when we confess our sins, God is faithful to forgive us (1 John 1:9). What specific sins do you need to confess to God right now to restore your relationship with the Holy Spirit?
- Cultivating a right heart: Instead of grieving the Spirit, you are called to "be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another" (Ephesians 4:32). What practical steps can you take today to grow in kindness, compassion, and forgiveness?

Grieving the Spirit

- The wilderness generation (Isaiah 63:10): Isaiah recounts how the Israelites "rebelled and grieved his Holy Spirit; therefore he turned to be their enemy". Their persistent unbelief and disobedience in the desert directly pained God's Spirit, who had led and redeemed them.
- Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1–11): This couple lied to the Holy Spirit by deceiving the church about the proceeds of their land sale. The Spirit, through

- Peter, exposed their deception, and they faced severe consequences. This is an extreme example of how disrespecting the Holy Spirit is a grievous sin.
- **King Saul** (1 **Samuel 16:14):** When Saul's disobedience and envy persisted, "the Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul." While the Spirit's indwelling is permanent for new covenant believers, this example illustrates how a refusal to walk in the Spirit can lead to a sense of God's presence being withdrawn.

Living in the Spirit

- David's prayer (Psalm 51:11): After his sin with Bathsheba, David prayed, "Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me." This shows a deep awareness of grieving God and a longing to restore that broken fellowship.
- **Jesus's example:** Although Jesus was never angry in a sinful way, he felt sorrow over the hardness of people's hearts (Mark 3:5). He showed the perfect example of responding to disobedience and sin with love and compassion, reflecting the very character of the Holy Spirit who indwells us.
- The fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22–23): Living in obedience to the Spirit produces a life marked by "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control". Journaling on this passage can help identify how to actively cultivate the qualities that please the Holy Spirit.







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The Piercing Pain that Awakens

⁴ My love thrust his hand through the opening, and my feelings were stirred for him.

⁵ I rose to open for my love.

My hands dripped with myrrh, my fingers with flowing myrrh on the handles of the bolt.

I opened to my love, but my love had turned and gone away.

My heart sank because he had left.

I sought him, but did not find him.

I called him, but he did not answer.

Songs 5:4-6

This is one of the most tender and piercing moments in the Song. The bride, swept away by an overwhelming tide of love, finally rises to open the door—but to her dismay, the Groom has vanished. Her heart, once riddled with uncertainty, now races with fervent desire. Yet, tragically, the opportunity seems lost. The emotional impact is staggering: yearning collides with silence, love confronts absence. This scene transcends mere moments of divine rejection—it's an invitation to a more profound intimacy. Theologically, it reveals a God who cultivates our love, not through demands, but by igniting it through longing. God's silence isn't an act of abandonment; it's an irresistible call. He withdraws not to chastise, but to amplify our hunger and sharpen the focus of our hearts.

⁸ Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.

James 4:8

James passionately declares: Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you! Yet, this divine closeness often emerges from a heart's deep longing, forged in the fiery heat of love that's momentarily out of reach. In the times when we feel the emotional embrace of God slipping away, our spiritual hunger burns brighter, urging us to seek not merely the gifts He bestows, but the very essence of who He truly is.

Psychologically, this moment encapsulates a profound universal experience: the heart-wrenching realization of how desperately we need someone, often when it feels too late to act on it. This is not manipulation; it is the essence of growth. Love blossoms into something deeper when it is no longer taken for granted. The bride's heart is now vibrantly alive, for the Groom's presence can no longer be assumed, and this stirs a powerful truth in human attachment: absence reveals true value. Neuroscience reveals that the bonds of attachment are solidified through separation and reunion. The pain of separation ignites a deep yearning to reconnect - and when the reunion occurs, it feels even more sacred. In a similar vein, God occasionally withdraws His felt presence to nurture a faith that transcends mere feelings, establishing a foundation rooted in unwavering trust.

In this fervent longing, the bride's pursuit turns fervently earnest. She sheds her former casualness, allowing her desire to crystallize into something profound, singular, and sacrificial. This stirring pain awakens - a sacred ache pulsates within every believer who has ever let slip a moment of obedience or missed a divine prompting. It does not condemn; instead, it beckons. It prepares the heart to fervently chase after love with renewed urgency and unwavering devotion.

In the end, this moment becomes sacred, a testament to the profound journey of the heart. The wound is genuine, yet it is the wound of love. And these wounds, far from destroying us, enrich our souls, allowing us to delve deeper into the essence of our relationship with the Lord.

Journal Prompt:

- Have you experienced a season where God felt distant?
- How did that shape your longing?

Practical Steps and Application:

- 1. Write about a time you felt distant from God and how H eventually drew you close again.
- 2. Sit in silence or 5-10 minutes and simply whisper "I long for you, Lord."
- 3. Listen to worship music that stirs your hunger for God's Presence.

Deeper Introspection:

Read James 4:8.

⁸ Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.

James 4:8

James 4:8 is a powerful invitation to intentional closeness with God, built on the reciprocal promise that as we draw near to Him, He will draw near to us. This call for intimacy is followed by two specific actions: "Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded." These actions represent the outward and inward cleansing necessary to restore a right relationship with God.

Drawing near

- The first move: The first part of the verse is a command: *Draw near to God*. While God is always with you, he waits for you to initiate the move toward a deeper relationship. What does "drawing near" look like in your daily life? How can you make it a more intentional, active part of your routine?
- A deeper desire: Do you truly desire a closer relationship with God? In Psalm 42:1–2, the psalmist writes, "As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God." Journal about your own desire for God's presence.
- The promise: Reflect on the promise, "...and he will draw near to you." What does God's nearness feel like? In what specific ways have you experienced God drawing close to you after you intentionally sought him?

Cleansing and purifying

- Sins of the hands: To "cleanse your hands, you sinners" refers to outward actions—the things you do that go against God's will. Write down any specific habits, behaviors, or "sins of the hands" you need to confess. What steps can you take to turn from these actions?
- The heart of the matter: To "purify your hearts, you double-minded," addresses your inner world: your thoughts, motives, and loyalties. Do you find yourself being "double-minded," torn between serving God and pursuing the world's desires? What worldly "masters" are competing for your heart's devo-

- tion, and how can you commit to wholehearted devotion to God?
- A clean heart: The psalmist prayed, "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me" (Psalm 51:10). Write your own version of this prayer, asking God to reveal and purify the motives of your heart that are not aligned with his.

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The Vulnerable Get Unyielding Pursuit

⁶ I opened to my love,
but my love had turned and gone away.
My heart sank because he had left.
I sought him, but did not find him.
I called him, but he did not answer.

⁷ The guards who go about the city found me.
They beat and wounded me;
they took my cloak from me—
the guardians of the walls.
Songs 5:6-7

The Journey of love is never one-dimensional. After delaying her response and finding the door empty, the bride dos not give up - she ventures out into the night to find the One her soul loves. This is a bold and costly decision. Vulnerability meets reality. She calls, but there's no answer. And then, in a shocking twist, the watchmen - the very ones meant to protect - wound her. What happens when seeking Christ results not in comfort but n pain? What happens when those who should support your spiritual hunger misunderstand or hurt you? This portion of the Song offers a sobering view of what maturing intimacy often includes: suffering in pursuit.

Theologically, this embodies a breathtaking cruciform pattern: a love that endures triumphantly through every wound. Just as Christ faced misunderstanding and rejection in His passion, so too does the bride, in her fervent quest for love, endure heartache. Yet, undeterred, she relentlessly continues her search. This resonates powerfully with the echoes of Gethsemane and the cross: a love that refuses to surrender, even amidst the deepest pain.

Psychologically, this profound experience mirrors the way spiritual longing ignites our vulnerability. When we courageously step beyond the comforting confines of routine and genuinely yearn for God, we often face fierce opposition—both from within ourselves, from those around us, and from the very cultural systems that surround us. Yet, these wounds do not signify that we have strayed; rather, they may be powerful indicators that we are navigating the right path. Neuroscience beautifully reveals that meaningful growth often comes hand in hand with stress or disorientation. The discomfort of

pushing beyond our limits catalyzes the creation of new neural pathways, reshaping our emotional and spiritual reflexes. This quest is not superficial; it dives deep into the soul. That profound depth frequently uncovers hidden fears, feelings of rejection, and the intricate dance of identity confusion.

⁶ Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

Matthew 5:6

Yet scripture passionately assures us — blessed are those who hunger! The ones who are wounded in their seeking are never abandoned. They are seen, they are honored, and their deep hunger will be filled abundantly.

Journal Prompt:

- Have you ever felt misunderstood or hurt while pursuing Christ more deeply?
- How did it effect your journey?

Practical Steps and Application:

- 1. Journal about a time when your spiritual pursuit came at a cost. What did you learn about God or yourself through it?
- 2. Ask God to heal any wounds you carry from being misunderstood or judged.

Deeper Introspection:

Read Matthew 5:6.

⁶ Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

Matthew 5:6

Matthew 5:6 declares, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled." This is not a casual wish, but an intense, all-consuming yearning for a restored, right relationship with God and others. The Beatitude is for those who are acutely aware of their spiritual need and actively pursue God's will and justice. Here are

some introspective journaling prompts to explore what it means to truly "hunger and thirst" for righteousness in your own life.

On diagnosing your spiritual hunger

- A "God-shaped hole": Do you ever feel an emptiness that material possessions, accomplishments, or relationships cannot fill? Describe this feeling. How does it change your perspective to understand that this emptiness might be a spiritual hunger intended to drive you toward God?
- The false substitute: Write about a time you tried to satisfy your spiritual hunger with something that did not last (e.g., career success, social validation, entertainment). What was the temporary satisfaction like, and what was the lingering emptiness that followed?
- Intensity of desire: Think of the last time you were ravenously hungry or intensely thirsty. That desperation is the biblical picture of spiritual hunger. On a scale of one to ten, how would you rate your spiritual appetite for God's righteousness, and what factors might be influencing that rating?
- Hunger for the source: The prophet Isaiah asks, "Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy?" (Isaiah 55:2). What "not-bread" do you spend your time and energy on, and how can you reorient that energy toward what truly nourishes your soul?

On pursuing personal and social righteousness

- The heart of righteousness: Righteousness encompasses being in a right relationship with God and extends to right relationships with others, including acting with justice, generosity, and compassion. Beyond your personal holiness, how intensely do you hunger for justice and righteousness to prevail in your community and the world?
- Facing your failings: The pursuit of righteousness makes you keenly aware of your shortcomings. Write about a recent mistake or sin. Does your sorrow over it lead you toward repentance and a deeper desire for God (godly sorrow), or does it lead to despair or self-pity (worldly sorrow)?
- The cost of conviction: Hungering for righteousness can often set you apart from the world. Are you willing to stand for what is right, even when it costs you social approval, comfort, or convenience? Reflect on a time you faced this

choice.

• From hunger to action: When someone is physically hungry, they seek food. When you are spiritually hungry, what specific actions are you compelled to take? How can you be more proactive in "seeking first God's Kingdom and His righteousness" (Matthew 6:33)?

On waiting for the promise of being "filled"

- "Already but not yet": The promise of being filled has both a present and a future fulfillment. How have you already experienced glimpses of God's satisfaction in your life? What about the ultimate, complete satisfaction of His presence in the age to come motivates your hunger today?
- The slow work of grace: The journey toward righteousness is often slow and filled with tension. How do you deal with the temptations and painful awareness of your imperfections on this long road? How does the promise of being "filled" sustain you during these moments?
- The gospel's assurance: Paul clarifies that righteousness is a gift received through faith in Christ, not something we can earn (Romans 4:5; 2 Corinthians 5:21). Write about how knowing that Christ's perfect righteousness is gifted to you changes the way you view your own hunger. How does this truth protect you from legalism and self-righteousness?

The Resounding Voice of Worship Song of Solomon 5:9

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The Resounding Voice of Worship

What makes the one you love better than another, most beautiful of women?
 What makes him better than another, that you would give us this charge?
 Songs 5:9

After the bride is wounded, the daughters of Jerusalem question her: "What makes your beloved so extraordinary?" In this pivotal moment, she finds her voice—not through dry theological arguments, but through a fervent, poetic adoration that spills from her heart. She does not merely recount the attributes of her Beloved; she exclaims His breathtaking beauty, His unmatched excellence, His divine radiance (Songs 5:10-16). This worship springs forth from a place of profound intimacy. Her pain has not silenced her; rather, it has purified her praise, allowing her to speak with unwavering conviction after having paid the high price for her love. This is the essence of true witness: it's not about persuading others with doctrine alone, but sharing from a place of deep, personal knowing that transcends words.

⁸ More than that, I also consider everything to be a loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. Because of him I have suffered the loss of all things and consider them as dung, so that I may gain Christ Philippians 3:8

Paul passionately mirrors this truth. After contemplating his religious heritage and moral achievements, he fervently declares that knowing Christ transcends everything else. It's not merely knowing about Him – it's about truly knowing Him. This is the essence of profound intimacy! Theologically, this marks the pinnacle of bridal maturity. The bride doesn't just yearn for the Groom – she fiercely defends Him. She delights in Him and joyfully names Him. The Church is called to embody this same fervor. We are destined to be a people consumed by love for Christ, so united with Him that our witness is simply irresistible – not because we hold all the answers, but because we intimately walk with Him.

Psychologically, testifying to what we love passionately reinforces our very identity. As we vocalize our love, it becomes deeply rooted in the fabric of our minds and hearts. When we express our affection aloud, it solidifies its place within us. The bride, by declaring the beauty of her beloved, powerfully reaffirms her own calling and profound connection. Neuroscience reveals that verbalizing our emotional experiences intensifies memory encoding. In other words, when we proclaim what we love, it etches itself deeper into our consciousness. Our language shapes our love with fervor. This is why worship transforms us so profoundly: it not only honors God - it awakens us, rewiring our souls to dwell in His sacred presence.

Her voice has blossomed into a powerful melody, captivating and resonant. Now, others are finally awakening to its profound call.

Journal Prompt:

- How would you describe Jesus to someone who has never encountered Him?
- What words come naturally and what words are hard to find?

Practical Steps:

- 1. Read Songs 5:10-16 aloud. Reflect on each description.
- 2. Write your own description of Christ. You can use metaphors, poetry, or simple words from the heart.
- 3. Share this with a friend or family member.

Deeper Introspection Part 1:

Read Philippians 3:8.

⁸ More than that, I also consider everything to be a loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. Because of him I have suffered the loss of all things and consider them as dung, so that I may gain Christ Philippians 3:8

Philippians 3:8 is a profound verse where the Apostle Paul expresses his radical reorientation of values after encountering Christ: "Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ."

Here are some introspective journal prompts to explore the depth of this verse in your own life.

Examining your own "gain"

- Paul's credentials: Before encountering Christ, Paul had an impressive resume of religious and worldly accomplishments, all of which he later considered "rubbish" (Philippians 3:4-7). Make a list of your own credentials, accomplishments, sources of pride, or things you trust in for your identity (e.g., job title, family reputation, academic achievements, moral record, social status). How have you been tempted to find your identity or security in these things instead of Christ?
- The "before and after": Reflect on your life before and after you truly began to know Christ. What things that you once considered "gain" have now lost their value to you? What does it feel like to release your grip on those things?
- The pursuit of "more": The world tells us that more is better—more money, more success, more influence. The pursuit of Christ, however, redefines what is "more." How has your definition of a fulfilling life changed since you started following Christ? Are there still areas where you are chasing worldly "more" instead of Christ?

Contemplating "surpassing worth"

- The superlative: Paul uses powerful language to describe "the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord". What makes knowing Christ so supremely valuable to you? What aspects of His character and what He has done fill you with the most awe and wonder?
- A personal experience: Describe a time when you experienced the "surpassing worth of knowing Christ" firsthand. Perhaps it was a time of suffering when His peace sustained you, a moment of sin where His forgiveness felt profound, or a period of blessing when you were overwhelmed by His grace.
- "Knowing" versus "knowing about": In biblical terms, "knowing" is not just

intellectual knowledge; it is a deep, intimate, and relational knowledge. What does your personal, experiential knowledge of Jesus look like? How is it different from simply "knowing about" Him?

Embracing "loss" and "gain"

- The cost of discipleship: Jesus taught that following Him involves a radical form of prioritization, even in our closest relationships (Luke 14:26). Paul's call to count everything as loss is a theme throughout Scripture. What is a specific, tangible "thing" or ambition you feel Christ is asking you to relinquish? What is the fear or anxiety that comes with letting go?
- **Joyful surrender:** The parable of the hidden treasure and the pearl of great price (Matthew 13:44-46) describes someone joyfully selling everything to possess something of great value. How can you move from a grudging surrender to a joyful release when you are asked to "lose" something for Christ?
- The ultimate prize: Paul suffered the "loss of all things" for one primary purpose: "that I may gain Christ". When you think about what it means to "gain Christ"—to be made right with God and to have an eternal relationship with Him—how does that overshadow any worldly loss you may experience?

Deeper Introspection Part 2:

Read Songs 5:10-16.

¹⁰ My love is fit and strong, notable among ten thousand.

His head is purest gold.

His hair is wavy
and black as a raven.

His eyes are like doves
beside flowing streams,
washed in milk
and set like jewels.

His cheeks are like beds of
spice,

mounds of perfume.

His lips are lilies,
dripping with flowing myrrh.

¹⁴ His arms are rods of gold
set with beryl.

His body is an ivory panel
covered with lapis lazuli.

¹⁵ His legs are alabaster pillars
set on pedestals of pure gold.
His presence is like Lebanon,
as majestic as the cedars.

His mouth is sweetness.
 He is absolutely desirable.
 This is my love, and this is my friend, young women of Jerusalem.

Songs 5:10-16

Song of Solomon 5:10–16 is a powerful and vivid passage where the bride, in response to a question from the daughters of Jerusalem, offers a detailed and poetic description of her beloved. Her elaborate, sensual metaphors celebrate his unique physical and personal characteristics, culminating in the declaration, "This is my beloved, and this is my friend". While a literal description of human love, the passage is also often interpreted allegorically to depict the church's intimate and adoring relationship with Christ.

Reflecting on his character and attributes

- "Altogether lovely" (v. 16): The bride describes her beloved as "altogether lovely" or "all of him is desirable". What specific qualities of Jesus are most lovely or desirable to you? Write down a list of His attributes—like His grace, patience, or justice—and reflect on what they mean to you personally.
- The "chiefest among ten thousand" (v. 10): The bride praises her beloved as exceptional and without rival. How do you view Jesus in comparison to all other things that compete for your admiration or devotion? In what areas of your life are you tempted to place something or someone else above Him?
- "His mouth is most sweet" (v. 16): The bride admires her beloved's sweet-speaking mouth. What are some of the "sweet" words or teachings of Jesus that have brought you comfort, healing, or guidance? How has hearing His words, through Scripture or through the Holy Spirit, affected your life?
- Seeing his worth: Just as the bride had to describe her beloved to others, take a moment to describe Jesus' worth to someone who doesn't know him. What are the key features you would highlight? What would you tell them about his grace and compassion?

Responding to his love

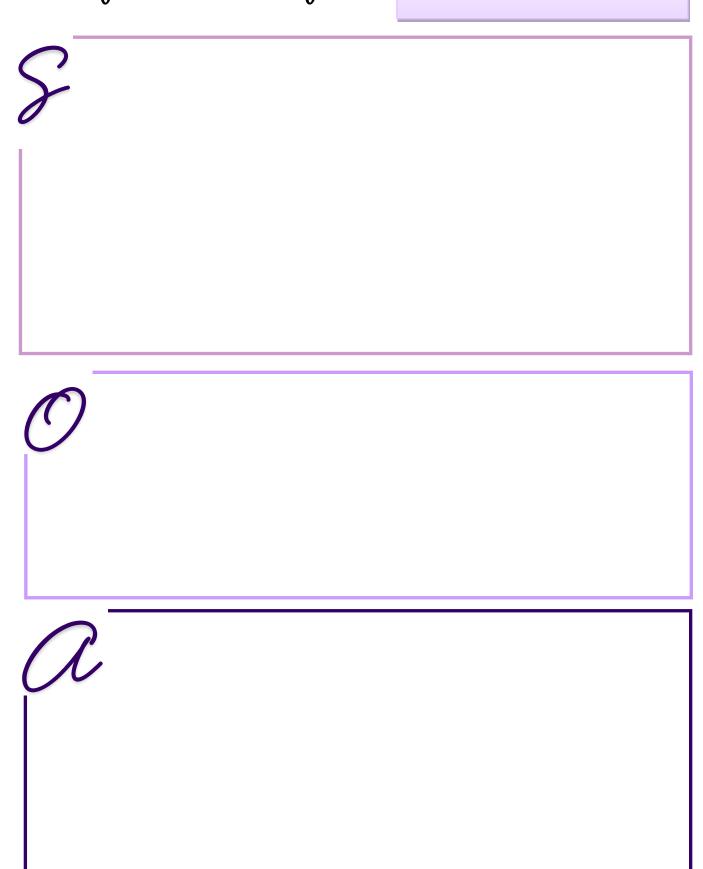
- "This is my beloved, and this is my friend" (v. 16): This phrase highlights the dual nature of the relationship—intimate love and deep companionship. How do you cultivate intimacy and friendship with Christ? What does it look like for you to love Him deeply as your beloved and trust Him fully as your friend?
- The bride's confession: The bride's public description of her beloved is an act of deep admiration. In what ways do you publicly acknowledge and speak well of Jesus? Are you comfortable sharing your love for Him with others, or do you keep it private?
- From imagery to reality: The rich, evocative imagery of the bride's description

(e.g., "His head is as the most fine gold," "His cheeks are as a bed of spices") helps her conjure his image. What personal, mental images do you use to draw near to Christ in your mind and heart? Do you visualize His sacrifice, His compassion, or His power?

Biblical examples and deeper reflection

- Psalm 45: The King's Beauty: This psalm poetically describes a king, which is often interpreted as a depiction of Christ. Read verses 1–8 of Psalm 45 and compare the majestic descriptions with the more intimate portrayal in Song of Solomon 5.
 - **Prompt:** How does the combined imagery of Christ's majesty (Psalm 45) and intimacy (Songs 5) enhance your understanding of who He is?
- **John 15:15:** "I have called you friends": Jesus Himself calls His disciples "friends," echoing the intimate sentiment of Song of Solomon 5:16.
 - **Prompt:** What does it mean for the King of Kings and Lord of Lords to call you His friend? How does that truth influence your daily walk and the way you approach prayer?
- Philippians 3:8: Knowing Christ: Paul states, "Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord."
 - **Prompt:** How does Paul's pursuit of "knowing Christ" reflect the same intense focus and appreciation the bride has for her beloved? What is the "surpassing worth" of knowing Christ in your life?

The Profound Restoration of Union Song of Solomon 6:2



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The Profound Restoration of Union

² My love has gone down to his garden, to beds of spice, to feed in the gardens and gather lilies. Songs 6:2

After a period of longing, delay, and suffering, the bride awakens to the revelation of where her Beloved has gone—not far away, not angry or abandoning her—but to His garden. This garden, a vivid symbol of intimacy, fruitfulness, and deep communication, whispers secrets of their connection. The Groom is not hiding from her; He is lovingly cultivating the ground of their love. This powerful recognition ignites a transformative shift within her. No longer consumed by panic, she possesses discernment. She understands that her Beloved has not forsaken her—He has been preparing a sacred place of restoration. Now, she can meet Him there, not in frantic pursuit, but in a serene and passionate reunion.

² He lets me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside quiet waters. Psalm 23:2

Psalms 23 reverberates with a profound rhythm of love: God guides us beside tranquil waters and rejuvenates our spirit. The garden transcends mere delight—it's a sanctuary for restoration. What was once shaken is being firmly rooted again. What was wounded is now on the path to healing. Theologically, this embodies the clarity of love that emerges after suffering. Maturity is learning to encounter God in the secret place, even when our emotions don't immediately align. We embark on a journey of faith, not solely driven by feelings. And in that faith, love grows ever deeper.

Psychologically, this is a profound testament to relational repair. True love embraces the beauty of rupture followed by the miracle of repair. The bride and the groom are not starting from scratch; they are boldly advancing, enriched with wisdom and a deeper bond than ever before. Neuroscience illuminates that consistent restoration after rupture weaves a tapestry of secure attachment. In both our human relationships and our sacred bond with God, the capacity to reconnect after experiencing pain is what forges enduring trust and profound joy.

Love has not simply endured; it has been passionately transformed, like a precious metal refined in the flames of experience, and now it blooms anew with an intensity that ignites the heart.

Journal Prompt:

- Can you think of a season God has restored your soul after a difficult time?
- What helped you experience that renewal?

Practical Steps and Application:

- 1. Spend quiet time in a garden or natural setting and reflect upon God's nearness.
- 2. Read Psalm 23.
- 3. Identify one area of your heart that still needs restoration and invite Jesus into it.

Deeper Introspection.

Read Psalm 23.

Verse 1: "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want."

- The Shepherd vs. False Guides: What or who do you often allow to "shepherd" your life besides God? This could be your career, other people's opinions, financial stability, or a certain image you want to project. How has following these other guides led you to feel a sense of want or lack?
- A "Lack" Mindset: When you feel a sense of lack in your life, what does that feel like? Write about the last time you felt you "wanted" something. How can you shift your perspective to trust that your Shepherd has already provided everything you truly need?
- **Relationship Status:** What is the difference between acknowledging that "God is a shepherd" and deeply believing that "The Lord is my shepherd"? How does your life reflect that intimacy, or lack thereof?

Verse 2: "He makes me lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside still waters."

• The Struggle to Rest: For many, the idea of lying down and resting is difficult. What internal or external pressures make it hard for you to rest? What are you

- afraid will happen if you simply stop hustling?
- Stillness in the Chaos: Recall a time when God provided a moment of peace for you amidst a chaotic situation. How did that stillness restore your soul, and what can you do to invite that "still water" experience more intentionally into your daily life?
- Reflecting on Pasture and Water: Sheep must be free from fear, hunger,
 pests, and friction with others to lie down. Which of these four obstacles prevents you from resting most often? How can you address this area with your
 Shepherd?

Verse 3: "He restores my soul; He leads me in paths of righteousness for His name's sake."

- Soul Restoration: Describe a period in your life when you felt lost, weary, or discouraged. How did God restore you? What does "restored soul" look like for you today?
- The Right Path: How do you determine the "right path" for your life's decisions? How do you distinguish between following God's guidance and simply following your own desires?
- For His Name's Sake: What does it mean that God leads you for "His name's sake"? Does this perspective change how you view your purpose or your calling? How does your life reflect His glory?

Verse 4: "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me."

- Walking, Not Staying: The psalm says "I walk *through* the valley," not "I live *in* the valley". Reflect on a current or past "valley" experience. What does it mean to you to know that the darkness is temporary and you are simply passing through it?
- The Presence of the Shepherd: Write about a time you faced a difficult situation but felt a powerful sense of God's presence with you. What was that experience like? How can you cultivate that awareness even when you don't feel it?
- The Rod and Staff: The shepherd's rod corrects and protects, while the staff guides. Think about a time God corrected or redirected you. How did His discipline feel, and how was it ultimately a form of comfort?

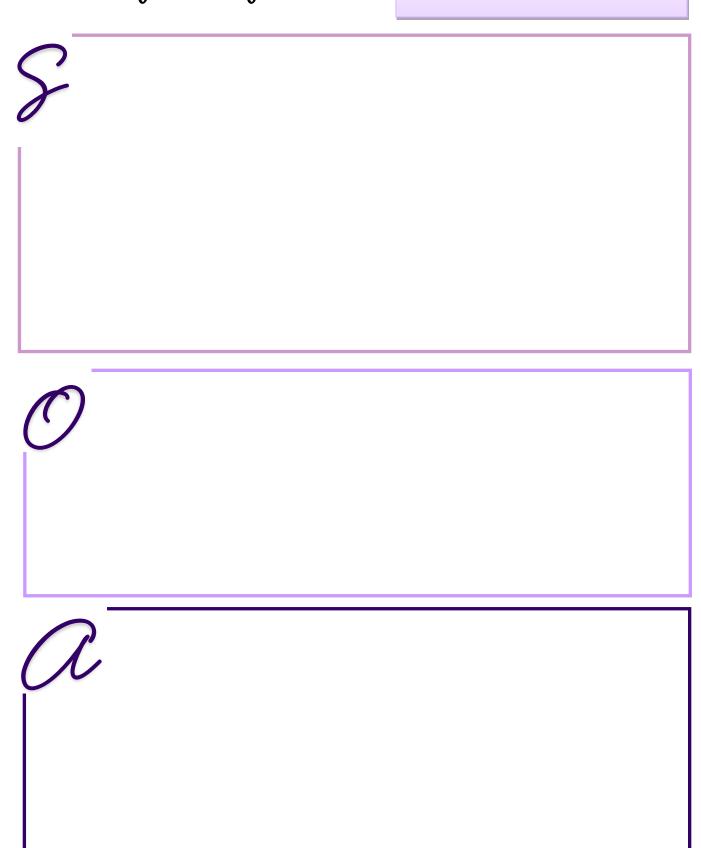
Verse 5: "You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows."

- Feasting in Adversity: How can you experience gratitude and abundance ("a table prepared") even when you are surrounded by challenges or hostile people ("in the presence of my enemies")? What does it mean to see God's provision regardless of your circumstances?
- The Overflowing Cup: Consider the areas of your life that feel abundant, not just materially, but spiritually and emotionally. How can you recognize these blessings and let them overflow into the lives of others?
- Anointed and Set Apart: Anointing with oil was a sign of honor and blessing. How does the knowledge that you are honored and blessed by God change how you carry yourself and interact with the world?

Verse 6: "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

- The Pursuing of Goodness and Mercy: The original Hebrew suggests that goodness and mercy *chase after* you, like a sheepdog corralling the flock. In what ways have you seen God's goodness and mercy relentlessly pursue you, especially when you felt you had wandered away?
- A Promise for a Lifetime and an Eternity: This verse offers both a promise for this life and an assurance for the next. How does the promise of dwelling in the house of the Lord forever change your perspective on your current trials and your future?
- A Sense of Belonging: The "house of the Lord" can be understood as a place of belonging. Where is it hardest for you to believe that you truly belong to God's family, and how can this verse ground you in that truth?

The Bountiful Fruit of Tested Love Song of Solomon 6:3



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The Bountiful Fruit of Tested Love

³ I am my love's and my love is mine; he feeds among the lilies. Songs 6:3

The journey culminates in a glorious union. After enduring pain, relentless pursuit, and the necessary pruning, the bride proclaims with fierce confidence: "I am my love's and my love is mine." There is no room for hesitation, no time for delay. This is the exquisite fruit of tested love - an unshakable bond that defies the ordinary. It transcends mere youthful infatuation; it is deep-rooted intimacy. She is firmly aware of her identity and the one to whom she belongs, and he echoes the sentiment. He lovingly tends His flock among the lilies—a vivid depiction of nurturing, peace, and unwavering presence. This is the ultimate gift of surrendered love: not a retreat from seeking, but a profound rest in communion. We never cease to grow; rather, we flourish from a place of assurance, not frenetic striving.

¹⁶ You did not choose me, but I chose you. I appointed you to go and produce fruit and that your fruit should remain, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he will give you.

John 15:16

Jesus passionately reminds us that we are not the initiators of this magnificent love - He chose us! He chose us to bear fruit, not out of obligation, but from the overflowing joy of our union with Him. Theologically, this is the stunning revelation of covenant love. It is not something we earn; it is a gift we receive, and it is enduring beyond measure. The bride now thrives from her identity, basking in confidence rather than drowning in insecurity.

Psychologically, secure attachment forms the very bedrock of a vibrant identity. When we truly know we are loved, our hearts overflow with love in return—not as a transaction, but as a beautiful reflection of that love. The soul that recognizes its belonging is liberated to give freely, unencumbered by fear. Neuroscience reveals that secure relationships forge a pathway to emotional stability and unwavering resilience. In the embrace of God's love, our minds and hearts resonate with peace—banishing panic from our lives. We cease the relentless pursuit of love and instead, joyfully abide in it. This narrative unfolds not towards a conclusion, but towards an eternal beginning of love untaint-

ed by fear.

Journal Prompt:

- What has this season taught you about your identity in Christ?
- What does it mean to live from belonging?

Practical Steps and Application:

- 1. Speak the words of Songs 6:3 out loud and let the words sink deep into your spirit.
- 2. Identify one way your love has matured over these past few weeks.
- 3. Thank Gd for the trials that brought you into a deeper union with Him.

Deeper Introspection:

Read John 15:16

¹⁶ You did not choose me, but I chose you. I appointed you to go and produce fruit and that your fruit should remain, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he will give you.

John 15:16

Here are deep, introspective journal prompts for John 15:16, broken down by key phrases, along with related scriptural references and examples for a deeper reflection.

"You did not choose Me, but I chose you"

- **Prompt:** Reflect on the moments in your life when you felt a divine invitation or calling, rather than an effort of your own. How does the knowledge that you were chosen—even before you knew it—change the way you see your faith journey?
 - Scriptural Connection: Ephesians 1:4 states, "even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world." 1 John 4:19 reminds us, "We love because he first loved us."
 - Example: Consider a time you felt direction in your life, such as a career path or a decision to serve others. Journal about how this sense of purpose was initiated by God, rather than being a result of your own

striving.

- **Prompt:** How does the security of being "chosen" by God free you from the need to earn your worth or acceptance? What fears or insecurities do you still carry, and how can the truth of this verse address them?
 - Scriptural Connection: In Romans 8:38-39, Paul reminds us that nothing can separate us from the love of God.
 - Example: If you often feel the pressure to perform perfectly or worry about failing, write about how the reassurance of God's prior choice can alleviate that pressure. Focus on accepting your identity as a chosen and beloved child of God.

"and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit"

- **Prompt:** What does "fruit" look like in your life right now? Be specific. Consider the fruit of the Spirit (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control) as well as the fruit of good works.
 - Scriptural Connection: Galatians 5:22-23 lists the fruits of the Spirit. Ephesians 2:10 says we are "created in Christ Jesus for good works."
 - Example: Make a list of recent actions or attitudes that reflect the fruit of the Spirit. For instance, "I showed patience with my co-worker today" or "I experienced a deep sense of joy when serving at my church."
- **Prompt:** In what areas of your life do you feel you are not "bearing fruit"? How can you surrender these areas to God and ask for His guidance and strength to cultivate growth?
 - Scriptural Connection: John 15:5 emphasizes that we can do nothing apart from Christ.
 - Example: If you struggle with a particular habit or attitude, write about your frustration and then commit that area to God in prayer, asking Him to help you bear good fruit instead.

"and that your fruit should remain"

- **Prompt:** What is the difference between temporary achievements and eternal, lasting fruit? How does understanding this distinction affect your daily priorities and motivations?
 - Scriptural Connection: 1 Corinthians 3:13-14 speaks of works being tested by fire, with only those that are lasting remaining.
 - Example: Contrast a career achievement that will fade with a spiritual act of kindness that has a lasting impact. Write about how prioritizing the eternal over the temporary changes your approach to work, relationships, and even your thoughts.
- **Prompt:** Consider a past action or season of your life where you believe you bore good fruit. How have you seen the lingering effects of that fruit in your life or the lives of others?
 - Scriptural Connection: Psalm 126:5-6 talks about those who sow in tears reaping with joy.
 - Example: Recall a time you mentored someone or extended grace to a difficult person. Journal about how that experience influenced you and, if you know, how it impacted the other person for the better.

"so that whatever you ask of the Father in My name He may give you"

- **Prompt:** How is bearing fruit connected to effective prayer? Do you find yourself praying differently when you are living a life of obedience and actively bearing fruit?
 - Scriptural Connection: John 15:7 promises that when we abide in Jesus and His words abide in us, we can ask for whatever we desire.
 - Example: Compare a time when you prayed out of anxiety or self-interest versus a time when you prayed with the peace that comes from a life aligned with God. Reflect on how your focus shifts from personal gain to God's will.

- **Prompt:** What does it mean to pray "in Jesus' name"? It's more than just a phrase at the end of a prayer. How can you ensure your prayers are aligned with His character and will?
 - Scriptural Connection: 1 John 5:14 says that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.
 - Example: Take a current prayer request and examine it. Is this request in line with Jesus' teachings? Rewrite the prayer to better align it with His will and character, committing to a prayer life that seeks His kingdom first.







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