

It's Complicated: Dating, Sex, Love, and Marriage *The Song of Songs*

Act Five: A Married Reflection on Young Romance *The Song of Songs 8:5 – 14*

Introduction: An Early Inspiration

(SLIDE 1) Welcome to the last part in our series 'It's Complicated: Dating, Sex, Love, and Marriage.' This week (SLIDE 2), we are talking about 'A Married Reflection on Young Romance.' Let me begin by telling you a story. When I was in college, I heard this story of a married couple. It challenged me, inspired me, and filled me with a deep sense of longing. The story was of Robert and Muriel McQuilkin, missionaries to Japan for 12 years (SLIDE 3). Being Japanese, I appreciated that! They had a fruitful ministry as church planters in Japan, had four of their six children in Japan, and then returned so that Robert could become President of Columbia Bible College in Columbia, South Carolina. Together, they worked hard to expand capacity, especially of the graduate seminary. But 10 years later, Muriel began showing signs of Alzheimer's Disease. She began forgetting things. Over the next 7 years, she deteriorated. Sometimes she would walk the half-mile to his office, and his secretary would have to tell her that he was in a meeting. So she would walk home. A little while later she would walk back. One day, she did that 10 times. That night when Robert helped Muriel with her clothes, her socks and feet were bloody.

In February 1990, Robert realized that Muriel needed him full-time and that the school needed a full-time president. So despite being a very popular president and despite advice that he put Muriel into someone else's care, he resigned from his post to care for her full time. He said in two similar speeches that I'm consolidating here, 'This is the easiest major decision that I ever made. Muriel is almost always happy with me, and almost never happy when not with me. In fact, she seems to feel trapped, becomes very fearful, sometimes almost terror, and when she can't get to me, there can be anger...she's in distress. But when I'm with her, she's happy and content. And so I must be with her at all times. And you see...It's not only that I promised in sickness and in health 'til death do us part, and I'm a man of my word. But as I've said, it's the only fair thing. She sacrificed for me for forty years, to make my life possible. So if I cared for her for forty years, I'd still be in her debt. However, there's much more. She's a delight. As I watch her brave descent into oblivion, Muriel is the joy of my life. Daily I discern new manifestations of the kind of person she is, the wife I always loved. I also see fresh manifestations of God's love - the God I long to love more fully. And it's a great honor to care for such a wonderful person. Integrity and fairness can be pretty stoic and heavy, but for me it is not—because I love her. I don't *have* to care for her, I *get* to.'

One interviewer asked Robert, 'Could she express her love to you?' Robert said, 'Valentine's Day was special to us because we got engaged on Valentine's Day. On that day in 1995—it had been a year since Muriel had spoken—I was on an exercise bicycle at the foot of her bed while she was waking up. At that stage she would often connect eyes with me briefly when she awoke and occasionally would smile. When she smiled, I put a flag in front of the house to let our friends and neighbors know that she smiled at me. I was talking to her that morning: 'Honey, they say we're victims. We aren't victims, are we? We love one another, right?'" And with that, her eyes popped open, and she said, "Love, love, love." Those were her first words in a year! I jumped off the bicycle, ran over, hugged her and said, "We really do love one another, don't we?" She couldn't find the word "yes," so she said, "I'm nice." That was about the last she ever spoke before she died in 2003.'¹

Relevance:

It is difficult to put into words the impact that had on me. I was inspired by them and still am. How? Obviously, I'm impressed by Robert McQuilkin's devotion to his wife Muriel. I hope that I have that kind of affection for my wife when I'm 60 years old. I hope that I will still be able to see what is best about her, as opposed to be drawn to all of her limitations and points of conflict with me. And I'm also impressed by Muriel McQuilkin's love for her husband. They say that when Alzheimer's Disease and other mental disorders set in, we show who we truly are. We can no longer hide behind carefully crafted masks. Muriel loved him. And who knows, but her many years of consciously being in Jesus' presence continued in some way during her illness to bring Robert such deep glimpses of her joy. The question for us, despite how young you are, is, 'How do you want this chapter to end, this chapter of

¹ *In Sickness and In Health*, http://www.billygraham.org/DMag_SpiritualHelp_Article.asp?ArticleID=575; see also *Muriel's Blessing*, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2004/februaryweb-only/2-9-12.0.html>

your life before Jesus returns? What will it read – your epitaph, not your resume? What kind of person will you be? And if you are married, at the end of your life, what will your husband or wife experience of you?’

Context:

We are in *The Song of Songs*. It is a script of a play, embedded in our Bibles. This masterpiece has five main parts. (SLIDE 4) We are looking into the fifth and final part. We’ve covered attraction, serious dating and courtship, the wedding day and the wedding night, and a scene from marriage stemming from a conflict in the bedroom. This week in Act Five, we see them in old age, reflecting on young romance. Once again, it is a rare treat for us to see the entire life span of a healthy, God-centered relationship. It is almost impossible to see all of any marriage relationship in real time. You may see your parents’ marriage when they are old, but you did not see your parents fall in love and get married. You didn’t see the problems they’ve always dealt with start back then. You didn’t learn how to identify them in seed form for yourself. Probably the only relationship you’ll ever see from young attraction until old age is your own. And of course, we all wonder how that will be? So that is why we all need to become familiar with this couple in this play, *The Song of Songs*. It is God’s gift to us.

The Couple at Old Age: v.5 – 7

Here we read the last Act. The friends see the couple and ask:

(SLIDE 5) *Friends*

^{8:5} Who is this coming up from the wilderness
Leaning on her beloved?

The picture is of the wife leaning on her husband. Although we cannot be absolutely sure how old they are, I think this is the couple at an older age, perhaps elderly. Earlier, the Shulamite had said that there were cultural limitations placed on a married couple in terms of public displays of affection. I’m not sure whether ‘leaning on his arm’ was usually okay or not, but the posture suggests an older age.

How do you want to die? When your life in this body draws to an end, how do you want to be? *Who* do you want to be? We rarely think about our lives like that. But we must, because that is when certain moments of clarity break upon us and the curtain opens into a deeper reality. Here is how the curtain opens for them. We overhear what they are talking about. She is not cranky and snappy at her husband after years of living with him. Instead, she is reflecting on love:

(SLIDE 6) *Shulamite*

Beneath the apple tree I awakened you;
There your mother was in labor with you,
There she was in labor and gave you birth.

Some interpreters believe that the Shulamite is referring to Solomon when she says, ‘Beneath the apple tree I awakened you; there your mother was in labor with you, there she was in labor and gave you birth.’ That is possible, as there was a Jewish custom to consummate your love in the room where you were born, already referred to in 3:4. But on their wedding night, they did not seem to be ‘beneath the apple tree’ (4:16) either literally or metaphorically. I think that the Shulamite is speaking about LOVE as if LOVE were a child, something that came into being when she and Solomon were married. As such, the whole section is a reflection on what married love is like. LOVE is ‘strong as death,’ ‘jealous,’ etc. Furthermore, the word ‘awakened’ clues us in (SLIDE 7): Act One and Act Two each ended with the phrase ‘Do not arouse or awaken LOVE’ (2:5; 3:5). Act Three ended with her calling upon her LOVE to ‘awaken’ (4:16). And Act Four ended with the phrase, ‘Do not arouse or awaken LOVE’ (8:4). LOVE is explicitly the topic in v.6 and 7.

(SLIDE 8) ⁶ Put me like a seal over your heart,

Like a seal on your arm.
For love is as strong as death,
Jealousy is as severe as Sheol;
Its flashes are flashes of fire,
The very flame of the LORD.

⁷ Many waters cannot quench love,

Nor will rivers overflow it;
If a man were to give all the riches of his house for love,
It would be utterly despised.

What do we learn about this kind of love? (SLIDE 9) *Love flourishes with someone who protects it.* ‘The apple tree’ refers to Solomon. Remember in 2:3, she called him an apple tree, and she delighted to sit in his shade. So when she says here, ‘Beneath the apple tree I awakened you,’ she is saying, ‘With Solomon, I awakened all my love: all the love my soul has to give, and all the love my body has to give. It includes sexual passions and desires but it’s also more than that. With only one husband, and under his protection and love.’ Love is specific and it flourishes in a protected space. May you all be apple trees under which your future spouse finds protection, *even from yourself*, because Jesus is in you to help you restrain your own self-centeredness. That is the ‘very flame of the LORD’ that came in Jesus to consume human sinfulness in him, and now comes through his Spirit in us, to consume our sinfulness.

Love involves waiting, even painful waiting. Love is like a child of the two people. In childbirth, there is a period of waiting, even painful waiting, and then celebration of the birth. In courtship, that involved waiting, and then celebration of marriage. Let me remind you of the Jewish cultural context here: Parents arranged engagements, but not marriages. There was a period of time where the two (now) young adults would get to know each other and confirm the engagement or not. They would decide whether to marry. Solomon and the Shulamite had to wait. They still had to discern. They went through the closest thing to dating that we find in the Bible. And it involved discernment and waiting. Like child labor, it was painful, this waiting.

Our culture is not used to waiting. We want everything now, now, now. What is especially hard, I think is that people are hitting puberty at a younger and younger age. It has to do with diet, junk food, and sometimes obesity. Now only that, we’re asking people to stay single for longer and longer: our parents tell us to not just finish college, but finish grad school, before getting married. This poses a double problem.

On the one hand, there is goodness to waiting. Here’s something I want you to remember. Repeat after me: ‘The only thing worse than being single...is being married to the wrong person.’ So as you try to figure out who that is, uncertainty is always your friend. If you are uncertain about someone, there’s a sense in which that is difficult, of course. But the uncertainty protects you from getting married to the wrong person! Identify the questions you need to figure out, and see how the two of you are answering them. And don’t rush.

Illus: One of the steps in waiting is to involve people in helping you discern whether you should get married. For example, Ming and I involved our communities of Christian friends and mentors with insight. Ming and I met on March 1, 1998. We started dating in May of 1998. By August or September ’98, we were pretty sure we wanted to get married. But we wanted to wait until we talked together with Christian mentors who had insight and discernment. In February of 1999, I was in Boston so we arranged to have dinner with three other couples: the two InterVarsity Area Directors, the Regional Director, and each of their wives. They had all been friends and Rich and Lisa had been mentors to Ming. I called that night ‘the Inquisition.’ We had dinner and then for a few hours they asked us questions. They had a lot of insight. By the end of the time, they said, ‘We really like your relationship; we think you’re a good match for each other. These are the challenges we think you’ll face, though.’ And they were right – for the last nine years, those things have come up for Ming and me in our marriage. It was amazing and very helpful. We were glad we waited. Why? Because Ming and I had an argument that lasted for the first five years of our marriage. I believed that some of her friends and church leaders were doing something very wrong. She felt protective of those people and felt that I was being overly critical. There were lots of raised voices, rolling eyes, and pointing fingers. During most of that time, we were not an ‘apple tree’ to each other. We had to learn a painful lesson, that God never designed marriage to be something that two people alone with just good intentions. He always meant for Himself to be involved.

At the same time, I feel the need to say that if you answer some of the most difficult questions together, have a connection based on values and a real commitment to Jesus, then you should get married. Many of our parents believe that you need to finish grad school, get a high paying job, and establish your careers before you get married. I don’t think so. On a practical level, it’s better to be married: you can live together; you save on rent; you can find community among other married couples; you can pay back loans more quickly; and you can have sex! On an emotional and spiritual level, you get practice prioritizing your marriage above your career, which is important.

You may not both go to the best grad schools. But success is not a value of Jesus'. So if one or both of you doesn't have the 'best' career choice because of a marriage, that's okay. So what does motivate our parents to say that we should finish grad school before we get married? Sometimes it's because they question your maturity, and that is valid. But sometimes it's because they want to see the title 'Dr.' by your name on the wedding invitations. That is not valid. So if the only reason you're waiting to get married is prestige, don't wait. Just get married!!!

Love is binding. She wants to be like a seal. In those days a person did not sign documents with an ink pen. Each person had a personal seal – usually a small cylinder of stone with etchings on it. The stone was rolled over soft wax or clay to make an impression on it. That indicated that it was from you. Seals were valuable possessions. If someone else acquired it, it was possible for them to forge documents in their name. To keep your seal safe, you would bind it close to your body, such as strapping it to your chest or tying it around your upper arm. By saying, 'Put me like a seal over your heart', she is saying that she wants to be treasured above all things. A binding over the heart shows the emotional bond. A binding on the arm suggests that her outward impact on others is the extension of his strength.

Love is jealous. This is not evil jealousy. It's not the jealousy of an insecure person who sees competitors around every corner. This is the person who will not let go of his or her sacred marriage bond, who is jealous in the best way, to honor God's design. Just as the grave holds tightly to those who are dead, a married person in love with their spouse will hold tightly to that person no matter what comes up. No matter what changes, events happen, and, before you realize it, the two of you are drifting apart. True love will not sit by and let that happen. It is the type of jealousy God had for His people when He saw them drifting into sin (Exodus 34:14, Zechariah 8:2).

That brings us to the next point, the most important: *Love's source is in the very being of God.* It is the 'very flame of the LORD.' Where does love come from in an atheist framework? Two Sundays ago, I was talking with three atheist students, all guys, just downstairs in the McElroy lounge. I asked the most hard core atheist where he thought love came from. I said, 'Well, in a naturalistic framework, isn't love just a chemical reaction in our brains?' He said yes. I said, 'And the type of women that we're attracted to is pre-determined by chemistry in our brains, right?' He agreed, and our chemistry is affected by our mother's face, early experience with girls, whatever. I said, 'And chemical reactions are always known beforehand; you know what you're going to get because it's an equation, right?' You chemistry students know that. He agreed. So I said, 'So who we're attracted to is just determined by chemicals, either in us or in other people; and everything was predetermined. There is no free will. From the Big Bang onward, everything has been just a series of chemical reactions. You're not really exercising choice at all. There is no real LOVE, just chemistry.'

The Christian response to that is that love's source is in the very being of God. There are aspects of God's love that we can sense in the love of parent to child, friend to friend, and so on. But there is an aspect of God's love that is glimpsed only in marriage, and then only as a married couple truly loves each other in the way God intended, with God at the center of it. Within God live the bonds of love that link Father and Son in the Spirit, a life-giving oneness. As individuals we can experience that: God extends His love to humanity because He has joined humanity to Himself only in Jesus in a life-giving oneness, and that's why Jesus says, 'as the Father has loved me, so I love you' (John 15:9) to produce a oneness by the Spirit. But within God's design for marriage lies a unique experience of that: God places an aspect of His love between husband and wife; that is a life-giving oneness.

And that has a practical implication: We can always ask God for help. A few years ago, I had the privilege of speaking at the wedding of my friends Lawrence and Annie, dear friends of mine from California. I'm not ordained, so it was a huge privilege. As we sat down and talked about their relationship and what stories I could tell, we laughed about how ambitious the wedding vows really are. 'In sickness and in health until death do us part'?!? Wow! If you paraphrased those vows, you could easily say, 'Even though we haven't known each other for very long, even though we've been on our best behavior throughout our courtship, and even though we have no idea how bad things can really get, I promise to love you, be faithful to you, and put your interests ahead of mine until one of us is dead.' When you put it in stark terms like that, you have to ask, 'What in the world are we doing when we get married?' But the other reality is that God is invested in the success of every marriage. Not just Christian marriages, although He is able to be much more active and powerful in marriages between two people in whom He lives. He is invested in every single marriage. Why? Because marriage is a picture of Himself. It's the closest thing to the love that exists in Himself, and the better that love is, the better the picture of His love to the world. So He wants every single married couple to come to Jesus and allow Him to directly place His own love, the love that

exists in Himself, into that marriage. He makes a claim on every married couple, on every marriage. Because He made it, and He made it to be a shadow and a whisper of Himself.

Illus: That also means that we have to perceive the God who casts His shadow, the God who speaks the whisper, the God who leaves the hints of Himself. Ultimately, love must be traced back to its source, its root: God. And we must look to God first, and not even to the marriage by itself. My friend Andy Crouch was on staff at Harvard when my wife Ming was also on staff, and at one of their large group meetings, he gave a message called *The Myth of Romance*. In it, he said that human love, even in marriage, is only a channel for the deeper love of God, but marriage is not the source of that love, so we must always look to God and not to the other person. For whatever reason, a student named Lydia Johnson had her father there at large group. Mr. Johnson had been divorced from his wife, and was dating another woman. But he realized that he had never looked to God. He hadn't really considered that God's love was first and fundamental. So he went home, broke up with his girlfriend, and turned to God. Over time, he reconciled with his ex-wife, though this was not a given nor was it automatic. They got remarried. And when Lydia got married, her mom and dad went up and told the story of how God healed them and their marriage. God is the source of love. The other person is not the source of love. Love comes through us, but it comes from God.

Finally, love is priceless. 'If a man were to give all the riches of his house for love [to try to buy it], it would be utterly despised.' Money does not buy love, because love can only be received from God as a gift that passes from Him to you, and through you to another. Love never stops with you. It passes through you to another. So money cannot buy love because love cannot be possessed. Your very desire to possess it is wrong and ungodly.

Illus: Carla

It is the 'very flame of the LORD' and the Lord will burn away everything

What Advice?: v.8 – 9

As an example of that love, then, the chorus of friends wants to know how Solomon and the Shulamite would give advice. Here's their situation:

(SLIDE 10) *Friends*

⁸ We have a little sister,
And she has no breasts;
What shall we do for our sister
On the day when she is spoken for?
⁹ If she is a wall,
We will build on her a battlement of silver;
But if she is a door,
We will barricade her with planks of cedar.

They are asking the question many of you ask: How do we encourage someone younger? Or what about myself? In their case, they have a little sister. She hasn't hit puberty yet. But what shall we do for her when she is spoken for? I think that refers to when her parents betroth her to someone. And they are concerned about any sexual activity she has. There are two options: to be a wall, and to be a door. A wall lets no one through. A door lets visitors through. In sexual terms, that is a big difference. But it points to a deeper emotional and spiritual reality. This is not simply about behavior, but a posture towards others. Is she driven by integrity, or by whim? Does she want to stand before God unblemished? Or does she ignore God?

Now that may seem like a strong dichotomy to you. Let me remind you of something that came up in Act Two. I'll repeat it here: At the very basic level, there is the question of learning how to handle your body. Part of growing up, I think, is learning how to live in your body, temper it, and control it. I see it in my kids. First they had to learn to bring their hands to their mouths. Then they had to walk. Now that they're in karate and ballet classes, they have to really learn to control their bodies. That happens for us with regards to our bodily senses. For instance, when I was growing up I was able to eat three Big Macs. I was able to eat a dozen donuts by myself. I loved the smell of gasoline, and would get out of the car when my parents stopped for gas and took a big whiff. Those are extremes. I think that's a natural part of growing up, but in other ways, it is killing our lungs. The issue is that as we grow, we

need fewer and fewer strong sensations. Over time, the natural course of growth as a person is to learn to appreciate subtle flavors, subtle smells, subtle humor. I can barely eat one Big Mac now; that orange sauce is just too much. Or, I can remember the day when I was 16 that I discovered that I liked bell peppers on my pizza, and then more vegetables. My parents were right. Extreme flavors, and repeating extreme experiences, were no longer attractive.

Sexual arousal and sex itself are the same way. First of all, we need to learn how to control our bodies in this way just like in every other way. Second, over time and in God's tutelage, we learn to appreciate subtlety. Hugh Hefner, the founder of Playboy, demonstrates my point by going the opposite direction. After his first wife admitted to having an affair, Hefner was devastated. He became a womanizer, and slept with woman after woman, Playmate after Playmate. Nothing satisfied him. He experimented with group sex and bisexuality. He overstimulated himself so much that he lost feeling and at times the ability to be aroused. That trajectory seems so dehumanizing to me, it's crazy. Everyone has desires; it's what you do with those desires that actually shape the desires themselves, and ultimately, you. Sex is really like every other sense we have. It is meant to mature so that it's not the extremes of wild sex with multiple people, but the subtlety of our one true love, our spouse, that gives us the most pleasure.

If you have sex while dating, you'll actually start to lose the ability to pick up on things because you'll form attachments and bonds with another person that are premature. You'll dull your senses. But when we are trying to discern, we need to be attuned to subtleties: 'Is this person emotionally healthy? Spiritually healthy? Is this relationship spiritually healthy?' To perceive Character and Core Commitment issues in a person, you need to have fine-tuned senses. The more Character and Commitment to Jesus you have, the more quickly you'll be able to sense it in others. In many ways, 'It takes one to know one.' That's why, although it seems counterintuitive, the most important thing for your *future* marriage is to love Jesus in the *now*!!

So the chorus of friends wonders about this younger sister they have. What kind of person will she be like? How will she handle her body and her desires and her self-esteem? Either she will be a wall or a door. If she resists the advances of men, then we will crown her with battlements of silver. Battlements crown the wall of a city's defenses. And the silver battlements will shine with confidence. The man who eventually shall dwell within her walls will feel utterly safe and honored. Remember that love flourishes in the protection of another. But if she's a door and lets men in, they will barricade her with planks of cedar. That doesn't mean that they're going to lock her in her room. It means that they will encourage her to close up, to be strong, to wait, and to find her strength in the Lord. They will strengthen her, or barricade her, with words.

Illus: Let me tell you about several people who were 'doors.' There was a guy, call him Man #1. He came to college and met Woman #1, who became his new girlfriend early in their freshman year. Unfortunately, he cheated on his previous girlfriend to get with Woman #1. To some of their friends, it seemed like he was dating Woman #1 because he was boosting his self-esteem, which was low, because he was lonely, and because he wanted to be physical. He was a 'door.' While dating, at times he seemed to take her for granted, even though she started sleeping over at his place, which was really inconvenient for his direct roommate. Woman #1 then began spending significant time talking with Man #2, who was in their circle of friends, and some would say that she was flirting with him. In other words, she was a 'door.' Man #2 started flirting back. Can you see the argument that was about to happen? Were they acting like doors or walls? Also, look at the role of the friends. Did they hold them accountable? Raise the important questions at the important times? Challenge them to seek the Lord? No. In reality, the guy friends of Man #1 knew that he had cheated to get with Woman #1. But they said nothing. Then, the girlfriends and roommates of Woman #1 knew when Woman #1 started sleeping over at his place, but they said nothing. Instead, they started to just back away in friendship from them both, because they felt awkward, without ever explaining the position they were being put in. Woman #1, confused, didn't know what to do. She started reaching out for more friendships, only with guys, namely Man #2. The guy friends of Man #1 and Man #2 also noticed the flirting happening, but still said nothing. It became an absolute disaster. If you are in the role of the friends, do you encourage your friends to be doors or walls? Or do you avoid the issues and the hard conversations? Because during this period of their lives, outside of marriage, it is also the 'very flame of the LORD' who wants to burn away our neediness and self-centeredness, because He wants to make us His people.

The Shulamite, now an old woman, looks back on young romance and says:

(SLIDE 11) *Shulamite*

¹⁰ I was a wall, and my breasts were like towers;

Then I became in his eyes as one who finds peace.

She says, 'I was a WALL.' I reserved myself for my future husband. My breasts were out of reach, like towers, high and in places of honor. She looks back on her youth and is glad that she made the choices she did. No one that I know of looks back after years of marriage and says, 'Well, I wish I had been more sexually active before I got married.' I just don't know anyone who has said that. She's glad that, before they were married, he made the decision to not arouse or awaken the married love that only married people are supposed to have.

The result of that? Peace. 'Then I became in his eyes as one who finds peace.' I was at peace. I was at peace with God, myself, my family. And as he looked at me, he could tell. There is play on words where 'Shulamite' means 'peace,' in the feminine just as 'Solomon' means 'peace' in the masculine. She became who she was meant to be, and therefore a fitting match for Solomon.

¹¹ Solomon had a vineyard at Baal-hamon;
He entrusted the vineyard to caretakers.
Each one was to bring a thousand shekels of silver for its fruit.
¹² My very own vineyard is at my disposal;
The thousand shekels are for you, Solomon,
And two hundred are for those who take care of its fruit.

Then she makes a clever metaphor. She playfully says that her body is a vineyard that is Solomon's for enjoyment. Note that Solomon does not say that her body is his, because that is not for him to say. It is hers to give. She says, 'You might have loaned your own actual vineyard to caretakers who work in the vineyard. They produce fruit and then buy it from you. But the vineyard of my body is my own. You get to work in *my* vineyard. You get to take care of *my* fruit. You get to receive *my* payment.' THAT'S A WITTY AND SPICY WOMAN!! Solomon then calls for her.

(SLIDE 12) *Solomon*

¹³ O you who sit in the gardens,
My companions are listening for your voice--
Let me hear it!

And she responds by saying, essentially, 'Let's go be intimate':

(SLIDE 13) *Shulamite*

¹⁴ Hurry, my beloved,
And be like a gazelle or a young stag
On the mountains of spices.

Whereas before, she invited him to be confident on the 'mountains of Bether' (2:17), which I took to mean the mountains of separation, or the things separating them, this time she refers to her own body, the mountains of spices. Apparently, with God as the foundation, marriage and sex can be really good even in old age. Can it really be true? I look forward to finding out! And I hope you do as well. This is indeed a good relationship from start to finish! What a treat to have walked with them in their journey. May you walk with the Lord in yours.