

Homiletics Analysis: Song of Solomon 5

Content & Intent

This Text — Content

Song of Solomon 5 occupies the structural and emotional center of the book. The chapter opens with the Bridegroom's arrival at his beloved's door (v. 1 is the consummation response; the chapter's main drama begins at v. 2). The Bride recounts a dream-like experience in which her Beloved comes to her door at night, knocking and calling. She hesitates — she has already prepared for sleep, already removed her robe, already washed her feet. By the time she rises to open, he has withdrawn. She goes out seeking him, is found by the watchmen who beat her and take her cloak, and is left wounded and vulnerable. She then turns to the daughters of Jerusalem and charges them to carry a message: she is lovesick. They ask what is so special about her Beloved. Her answer — one of the most elaborate and extended praise descriptions in the entire poem — occupies verses 10–16: a *wasf* (descriptive praise song) cataloguing the Beloved from head to foot, concluding with his identity: “This is my beloved and this is my friend.”

The chapter's movement is: consummation (v. 1) → hesitation and delay (vv. 2–3) → loss (v. 4–6) → seeking and suffering (vv. 7–8) → questioning (vv. 9) → extravagant praise (vv. 10–16). The chapter thus dramatizes the pattern of intimacy deferred, longing intensified, and love articulated through loss.

This Text — Intent

God is using this chapter to do two things in concert: first, to portray the nature of love that is willing to suffer for its object — both the Beloved who comes and withdraws, and the Bride who suffers in seeking. Second — and this is the chapter's climactic intent — to produce in the reader the Bride's own answer: a full, vivid, articulate praise of the Beloved. The chapter does not end in grief. It ends in the Bride's mouth filled with the description of who he is. God intends this passage to move the reader from the experience of the Beloved's absence into the discovery that absence drives deeper knowledge, and deeper knowledge overflows into praise. The intent is doxological: the reader should finish this chapter with the Bride's words on their lips — “This is my Beloved and this is my Friend.”

Subject Sentence: Love persists through absence, seeks through suffering, and erupts in praise of the Beloved.

Primary Claim: God is using the Bride's experience of loss, longing, and suffering to produce in His people a deeper, more articulate, more costly love — one that cannot be satisfied with anything less than the Beloved Himself, and that overflows in extravagant, specific praise of who He is.

Interpretive Evaluation

The allegorical versus literal reading

The most fundamental interpretive question in the Song is whether the poem is properly read as literal erotic love poetry celebrating human marriage, as allegory for God's love for Israel or Christ's love for the Church, or as both simultaneously (the typological reading). Chapter 5 sharpens this question because it contains the most explicit portrayal of physical desire in the book (the *wasf* of vv. 10–16) alongside the most dramatic portrayal of spiritual longing (the night-seeking of vv. 6–8).

The Jewish interpretive tradition, from the Mishnah's famous declaration by Rabbi Akiva that the Song is "the Holy of Holies of all Scripture" through Rashi and medieval commentators, reads the chapter as a portrayal of Israel's relationship to God — the hesitation of v. 3 representing Israel's failures of devotion, the beating by the watchmen representing the discipline of exile, and the *wasf* representing Israel's praise of God's attributes. This reading has the advantage of explaining why the book was considered canonical and why v. 3's apparent self-absorption reads as a theological complaint, not merely a personal one.

The Reformation-era and Reformed tradition has generally held the typological reading: the Song celebrates real human marriage *and* simultaneously points beyond itself to Christ's love for His Church. Bullmore's content/intent discipline is decisive here — the *intent* of this passage, as located in the canon, cannot be merely human romance, because the canon does not include a book whose governing claim is only horizontal. The typological reading is preferred: the human love is real, celebrated, and not allegorized away — but it is written as a type that points to the greater love of the greater Bridegroom.

The hesitation in verse 3

A significant question is whether the Bride's hesitation (vv. 2–3) is morally culpable delay or simply the disorientation of a dream state. Some commentators (Longman, Murphy) read the passage as a dream and therefore strip the hesitation of moral weight — she cannot help what she does in a dream. Others (Fox, Bloch) read it as a waking narrative in which the hesitation is real, representing the real failure of lovers to seize the moments of intimacy available to them.

The Reformed reading prefers neither pure dream nor pure waking narrative, but recognizes the text's deliberate ambiguity as functional. Whether or not it is a dream, the moral and spiritual point is clear: delay has consequences, love deferred costs something,

and what is lost through hesitation must be sought through suffering. The chapter does not present the Bride as culpable in a judicial sense — she is not condemned — but neither does it present her hesitation as neutral. The suffering that follows is presented as the natural consequence of not opening when the Beloved knocked. This reading is consistent with Christ’s later use of the door/knocking image (Revelation 3:20) and with the wisdom literature’s general pattern of cause and consequence.

The suffering in verses 7–8

Wesleyan and some Baptist readings tend to minimize the violence of v. 7 (the watchmen beating and wounding the Bride, taking her cloak) as perhaps literal urban danger or as a test of perseverance. The allegorical reading is more theologically generative: the suffering of seeking is part of the love relationship’s cost. The Reformed reading neither dramatizes the suffering nor explains it away — it notes that the text presents the Bride as willing to be wounded in the process of seeking her Beloved. This is not masochism but the logic of costly love: the thing worth having is worth suffering to find. This coheres with the broader biblical pattern of covenant love that perseveres through hardship (Hosea 3; Ruth 1; Romans 8:35–39).

The *wasf* as doxology

Many readers treat vv. 10–16 primarily as an aesthetic literary piece — beautiful but secondary to the narrative drama. This misses the chapter’s intent entirely. The *wasf* is the chapter’s *goal*, not its decoration. The daughters of Jerusalem’s question (“What is your Beloved more than another?”) is the hinge: the chapter’s whole drama has driven the Bride to a place where she cannot stop speaking about who he is. The Reformed reading insists that the passage’s climax is doxological — it produces praise, and the most specific, detailed, physically extravagant praise the poem contains. This is not incidental.

Key Canonical Support

- **Hosea 2:14–16** — God promises to “allure” Israel into the wilderness and speak tenderly to her; discipline and deprivation become the vehicle of renewed intimacy. Directly parallel to the dynamic of Chapter 5’s loss-as-precondition-of-deeper-love.
- **Psalms 63:1–8** — David’s “earnest seeking” in a dry land, his soul thirsting for God, his satisfaction in praise: “my soul clings to You.” The closest Old Testament parallel to the Bride’s posture in vv. 6–8 and her overflow in vv. 10–16.
- **Revelation 3:20** — Christ stands at the door and knocks; the one who opens will dine with Him. The striking verbal and conceptual echo of Song 5:2–6 confirms the typological reading and grounds the Bride’s hesitation as a warning to the complacent church.

- **John 20:11–18** — Mary Magdalene seeks the one she loves, weeping at the tomb, going out alone, encountering loss before recognition. Structural parallel: seeking after apparent loss, suffering in the seeking, and arriving at a personal naming of the Beloved (“Rabboni”).
- **Philippians 3:8–10** — Paul counts all things as loss in order to gain Christ and “know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings.” The logic of costly, surpassing love that willingly suffers for its object directly echoes the Bride’s movement in vv. 7–8.

Aim: To lead the reader through the Bride’s experience of longing, loss, and costly seeking so that they arrive, with her, at an articulate, costly, and overflowing praise of the Beloved — and to identify where complacency, comfort, and delay have kept them from opening the door.

Content Table

Verse(s)	Content	Notes
1	Bridegroom’s arrival and invitation to feast; friends invited to celebrate	Likely the consummation scene; functions as cap to ch. 4 and threshold for ch. 5’s drama
2	Bride hears Beloved’s voice at the door; he knocks and calls — “open to me”	The “I slept but my heart was awake” suggests dream-state ambiguity; the knocking is urgent and intimate
3	Bride hesitates — already undressed, feet washed; “How can I?”	The hesitation is real, regardless of dream-state; small comfort preferred over the cost of opening
4	Beloved puts his hand through the door; her heart was moved (<i>yearned</i>) for him	The gesture intensifies desire; the delay is now producing what presence had not: acute longing
5	Bride rises to open; her hands dripping myrrh on the handles	The myrrh detail (rare perfume) may indicate the Beloved has left an anointing gift; she now moves
6	She opens — he is gone; her	“My soul failed” — the word

Verse(s)	Content	Notes
	soul failed when he spoke; she seeks, calls, no answer	suggests near-fainting grief; the withdrawal is the cost of the delay
7	Watchmen find her, strike her, wound her, take her cloak	Urban danger, or allegorically: the cost exactd from those who seek love through the dark places
8	She charges daughters of Jerusalem: "Tell him I am lovesick"	The suffering has not cooled the love — it has intensified it into a public declaration
9	Daughters ask: "What is your Beloved more than another?"	The challenge question — the necessary hinge that unlocks the <i>wasf</i> ; the world wants to know why
10	"My Beloved is radiant and ruddy, distinguished among ten thousand"	The praise begins: he is singular, superlative, incomparable
11	His head: finest gold; his locks: wavy, black as a raven	Physical description begins at the top; gold = royal, precious
12	His eyes: like doves by water, washed in milk, set like jewels	Gentleness and clarity; the eyes are the seat of intimacy in the Song
13	His cheeks: beds of spice; his lips: lilies dripping liquid myrrh	Fragrance imagery; his very words/presence are intoxicating
14	His hands: rods of gold set with jewels; his body: ivory work encrusted with sapphires	Strength and beauty combined; craftsmanship imagery — deliberate design
15	His legs: alabaster columns set on gold; his appearance: like Lebanon, choice as the cedars	Majesty and height; Lebanon/cedar = the grandest natural imagery available
16	His mouth: most sweet; he is altogether desirable — "This is my Beloved and this is my Friend"	The climax: totality of praise, and the double identification — not just Beloved but Friend

Divisions Table

Division	Verses	Label
1	1	The Feast: Consummation and Celebration
2	2–3	The Door: Invitation and Hesitation
3	4–6	The Cost: Longing Ignited by Loss
4	7–8	The Search: Suffering in Pursuit of the Beloved
5	9	The Question: What Makes Him Worth It?
6	10–16	The Answer: Extravagant, Articulate Praise

Subject Sentence & Primary Claim (*restated*)

Subject Sentence: Love persists through absence, seeks through suffering, and erupts in praise of the Beloved.

Primary Claim: God is using the Bride’s experience of loss, longing, and costly seeking to produce in His people a deeper, more articulate, more costly love — one that cannot be satisfied with anything less than the Beloved Himself, and that overflows in extravagant, specific praise of who He is.

Applications (Five)

1. Recognize the door-moment before it passes. (*Mind/belief*) The Bride’s hesitation in verse 3 is not dramatic rebellion — it is the quiet preference of comfort over cost, of an already-made bed over the disruption of opening the door. Most spiritual drift looks exactly like this: not apostasy, but small, plausible delay. The application is cognitive: identify the moments in your life right now when Christ is knocking and you are offering a reasonable excuse not to rise. The reasonable excuse is the danger. What robe have you already removed? What does it cost you to get up and open?

2. Let the withdrawal produce what presence did not. (*Affections/worship*) Verse 4 is striking: the Bride’s heart is “moved” — *yearned* — for the Beloved *after* he has partially withdrawn, not before. This is not a failure of the relationship but a feature of it: sometimes the awareness of distance produces a depth of longing that uninterrupted presence had not. Do not treat seasons of spiritual dryness as evidence that God has abandoned you. Ask instead what the dryness is producing in you. Is it a deeper, more articulate hunger? The chapter’s testimony is that the withdrawal, received rightly, ignites a love more intense than the comfort that preceded it.

3. Be willing to be wounded in the search. (*Will/behavior*) Verses 7–8 present a Bride who is struck, wounded, and stripped — and who does not go home. She charges the daughters of Jerusalem to carry her message: *I am lovesick*. The application is concrete: there are

costs in the pursuit of Christ that the comfortable church has decided are too high. Identify one specific cost you have been unwilling to pay in your pursuit of Christ — a relationship, a reputation, a comfort, a safety. The Bride's willingness to be wounded in the search is not presented as exceptional. It is presented as what love looks like when the Beloved is worth more than the cloak.

4. Be able to answer the question: what makes Him different? (*Mind/belief*) The daughters ask in verse 9 what makes this Beloved more than any other. It is the question the world will always ask, and it is a fair question. The Bride's answer is not vague — it is verse after verse of specific, vivid, particular description. The application is diagnostic: Can you answer that question with that kind of specificity? Or has your language about Christ remained at the level of "He is good" and "He has done a lot for me"? The *wasf* is a model of theological and relational fluency — knowing the Beloved well enough to describe Him in detail. Cultivate that fluency. Read the Gospels the way the Bride looks at her Beloved. Develop a vocabulary for who He actually is.

5. Let your mouth be filled with specific, overflowing praise. (*Affections/worship*) The chapter ends not in grief but in doxology. The loss, the seeking, the suffering — all of it drives the Bride to a place where she cannot stop speaking. "His mouth is most sweet, and he is altogether desirable." The chapter's final movement is an act of praise so full it can only end with the totality: *altogether desirable*. The application is worshipful: come to Christ not only with your petitions and your obedience but with your praise — and let it be specific. Tell Him, and tell others, exactly what makes Him altogether desirable to you. The Bride's praise is the chapter's destination. It should be yours too.

Theological Importance

Theological Importance: Song of Solomon 5 teaches that the love between God and His people is not a static or merely positional reality — it is a dynamic, tested, and costly relationship in which intimacy can be delayed by the Beloved's people, withdrawal can be a vehicle of deepening desire, and suffering in the pursuit of God is both real and purposeful. The chapter teaches the doctrine of divine condescension and initiative: the Beloved comes, knocks, calls, and leaves a gift even when the Bride does not open — His love precedes and outlasts her failure. It also teaches that love's proper outcome is not merely union but doxology: the Beloved is so entirely desirable that the one who has truly sought and found Him cannot stop speaking of who He is. The *wasf* of vv. 10–16 is not romantic decoration but theological content — it models the kind of specific, total, articulate praise that is the proper overflow of genuine knowledge of God.

Reformed Theological Significance

Reformed Theological Significance: Within Reformed theology, Song of Solomon 5 has particular significance for its portrayal of the believer's experience of Christ — what the Westminster tradition calls the “sense of God's love” and what the Puritans described as the experienced reality of union with Christ. The chapter speaks directly to the question of assurance: not the assurance of position (which is never in doubt in the Reformed framework), but the assurance of felt communion, which can be lost through spiritual complacency and recovered through costly seeking. The Bride is never in doubt of the Beloved's love — she is in grief over her own failure to rise when He knocked. This is an exact mapping of the Reformed doctrine of the believer's varying experience of God's constant love. Furthermore, the chapter's insistence that love overflows in specific, articulate praise grounds the Reformed emphasis on the ministry of the Word: the goal of all exposition is not merely that people know the right things about Christ but that their mouths are filled with specific, overflow praise — “This is my Beloved and this is my Friend.”

Main Takeaway

Christ is at the door. He has been there longer than you realize, and He is worth more than the comfort of staying in bed. If you have delayed, if you have lost the felt sense of His presence, the answer is not despair — it is pursuit, even if that pursuit costs you something. And if you pursue Him, this chapter promises you will find Him — and when you do, you will not be able to stop talking about who He is. He is altogether desirable. Let that be enough to make you rise.

Preaching/Teaching Pitfalls

- **Reducing the chapter to a marriage enrichment talk.** The Song's celebration of human marriage is real and should not be allegorized away — but stopping there evacuates the passage of its canonical weight. The chapter's pattern of absence, longing, seeking, and praise maps too precisely onto the believer's experience of Christ to be left at the horizontal level. A sermon that ends with “this is how couples should pursue each other” has preached the type but not the antitype. Preach both, but do not stop at the earthly.
- **Dwelling on the Bride's hesitation as guilt rather than as warning.** The chapter does not condemn the Bride — she is not cast out, not declared unfaithful, not left permanently bereft. The hesitation is presented as a cause with consequences, not as a sin requiring atonement. Over-moralizing the hesitation — “this is how badly you fail God when you don't read your Bible every morning” — turns a dynamic narrative into a guilt trip and obscures the chapter's actual trajectory, which is toward praise, not shame.

- **Preaching the *wasf* as a literary aside rather than the chapter's climax.** Verses 10–16 occupy more than a third of the chapter's length and contain its final word. Preachers who spend most of their time on the drama of vv. 2–8 and then rush through the *wasf* as “and then she praised him” have inverted the chapter's structure. The praise is the point. Slow down at vv. 10–16. Let the congregation hear what specific, articulate, extravagant praise of the Beloved actually sounds like.
- **Treating Revelation 3:20 as the passage's primary meaning rather than as canonical confirmation.** Revelation 3:20 (“I stand at the door and knock”) is a genuine and important canonical echo of Song 5:2, and it confirms the typological reading. But preaching Song 5 as “really just an illustration of Revelation 3:20” reverses the canonical order and flattens the Song's own richness. The Song is not an illustration of Revelation — Revelation is drawing on the Song's imagery. Let the Song make its own case; note the Revelation echo as confirmation, not as primary content.
- **Missing the lovesickness of verse 8 as a theological statement.** The Bride's charge to the daughters — “tell him I am lovesick” — is one of the most direct statements of the desire-theology of the Song. Lovesickness is not weakness; it is the proper state of a soul that knows what it is missing and refuses to be consoled by substitutes. Preaching that normalizes a low-desire, low-longing approach to Christ (“just be faithful, don't worry about feelings”) will skip past v. 8 entirely. The chapter insists that the proper response to the Beloved's absence is not stoic endurance but open, declared, even embarrassing lovesickness. Preach that.
- **Failing to call the congregation to the Bride's answer in verse 16.** The chapter's last line — “This is my Beloved and this is my Friend” — is a declaration, not a description. It is what the Bride says to the daughters of Jerusalem after everything she has endured. The sermon should close in the same place: calling the congregation to be able to say those words and mean them — with the full knowledge that it cost the Bride something to arrive there, and it will cost them something too.