

Homiletics Analysis: Song of Solomon 6

Content & Intent

This Text — Content

Song of Solomon 6 resumes after the crisis of chapter 5, where the beloved searched for her lover and could not find him, and the daughters of Jerusalem asked where he had gone. Chapter 6 opens with the daughters of Jerusalem inquiring after the shepherd-king, to which the beloved responds with serene confidence: she knows exactly where he is — in his garden, among the lilies, where he pastures his flock. She is his and he is hers. The text then pivots to the lover's return, and he addresses the beloved with an extended description of her beauty (vv. 4–10), comparing her to Tirzah, Jerusalem, and the moon and sun in splendor. He recounts how her beauty overwhelmed him and how she is unrivaled among all women — queens, concubines, and maidens alike. Verses 11–12 introduce a brief, difficult movement in which the beloved (or possibly the lover) goes down to the garden to observe the spring blossoms, only to find herself transported in some unexpected and celebrated way. The chapter closes (vv. 13) with the daughters of Jerusalem calling to the Shulammite and the lover defending her beauty against any who would diminish it, comparing her to a dance between two armies.

This Text — Intent

God is seeking to accomplish a recalibration of the reader's understanding of covenant love — particularly its resilience after disruption and its capacity for renewal. The crisis of chapter 5 (separation, failure to answer the door, painful searching) is resolved here not by drama but by quiet confidence and restored delight. The beloved's answer to the daughters — “he has gone down to his garden” — is not a discovery; it is a confession of settled knowledge. Disruption has not destroyed intimacy. The lover's return with exuberant praise of the beloved confirms that the love is not diminished by the crisis but is fully, even overwhelmingly, restored. God intends through this passage to press upon the reader the durability and delight of covenantal love — that genuine love, tested by absence and failure, reasserts itself with greater intensity, that the beloved is not merely tolerated but singularly prized, and that such love is ultimately a portrait of the LORD's relentless pursuit and delight in His covenant people despite their failures and wanderings.

Subject Sentence: Covenant love reasserts itself — crisis resolved in renewed mutual belonging and overwhelming delight.

Primary Claim: God is demonstrating through this passage that covenant love is not destroyed by disruption but emerges from crisis with renewed intensity — and calling those who belong to Him to receive His delight and rest in the security of mutual belonging, even after failure.

Interpretive Evaluation

The Question of Allegory vs. Literal Reading

The most significant interpretive fault line for the Song as a whole — and for this chapter in particular — is whether the text functions primarily as a celebration of human erotic love (the literal/naturalistic reading), as an allegory of the LORD's love for Israel or Christ's love for the Church (the allegorical reading), or as typological poetry in which the literal celebration of human love simultaneously points beyond itself to divine-human covenant love (the typological-canonical reading).

The allegorical reading, dominant in rabbinic interpretation (where the Song depicts the Exodus and Sinai covenant) and in much patristic and medieval Christian interpretation (where it depicts Christ and the soul or Christ and the Church), tends to suppress the bodily and erotic dimensions of the text and import detailed correspondences that the text does not clearly signal. Origen's reading, for instance, maps each garden element and descriptor onto stages of the soul's ascent — a move the text itself does not invite and cannot control. This reading must be *qualified*: it captures the canonical truth that the Song belongs to the covenant theology of Israel and that its love-language resonates with the prophetic marriage imagery of Hosea, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Ephesians 5 — but it suppresses the literal register and over-allegorizes details that the text presents as delightful in their own right.

The strictly naturalistic reading (associated with some critical scholars and with readings that would exclude the Song from the canon's theological concerns) treats the text as ancient Near Eastern love poetry and nothing more — the theological dimension is accidental or imported. This must be *refuted*: the canonical placement of the Song within the Wisdom literature, its consistent use of covenant-resonant language (garden, vineyard, beloved/lover language echoing Genesis 2), and its reception within both Jewish and Christian canonical traditions make the purely secular reading impossible to sustain exegetically. The Song is doing theological work whether or not it signals allegory at every point.

The Reformed reading — shared broadly with conservative evangelical hermeneutics — treats the Song as genuine celebration of human erotic love within covenant marriage, which simultaneously and by design functions typologically as a portrait of the LORD's delight in and pursuit of His people (Isaiah 62:5; Ephesians 5:25–32; Revelation 19:7). This reading does not allegorize every detail but receives the whole as a canonical witness to the goodness of embodied love and as a type of divine love. Chapter 6 specifically

supports this reading: the beloved's confident "I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine" (echoing 2:16) is not merely romantic but covenantal — it is the language of mutual possession that runs throughout Scripture's covenant formula ("I will be your God and you will be my people"). The lover's description of the beloved as unrivaled among all women carries weight beyond mere flattery when read canonically: it resonates with the LORD's election of Israel as His treasured possession (Deuteronomy 7:6) and Christ's presentation of the Church as His singular bride (Ephesians 5:27).

The Difficult Verses (11–12)

Verses 11–12 are among the most textually and interpretively difficult in the entire Song. The identity of the speaker (beloved or lover), the meaning of "my soul set me among the chariots of my kinsman, a prince" (ESV) or "my desire set me among the chariots of my noble people" (alternate), and the nature of the transportation described are all contested. The LXX, Vulgate, and various English translations diverge significantly. The Reformed reading does not require resolution of every text-critical difficulty here — the passage's primary claim does not depend on precise exegesis of these verses. Preachers should acknowledge the difficulty honestly rather than forcing a confident interpretation where the text is genuinely obscure. The surrounding context (garden, spring blossoms, delight in renewal) supports reading verses 11–12 as a movement of unexpected joy and transport — the beloved overwhelmed by the return of spring and love's renewal — without insisting on a specific referent for the "chariots."

The Reformed Verdict

The Reformed typological reading is to be preferred: receive the Song as a genuine celebration of human erotic love within covenant marriage, recognize its deliberate canonical echoes of covenant theology, and allow the whole to function as a portrait of divine love — without allegorizing every detail or suppressing the bodily register. For chapter 6 specifically, the primary claim centers on the resilience and renewed intensity of covenant love after disruption, and this claim carries full weight at both the human and divine levels simultaneously.

Key Canonical Support

- **Genesis 2:23–25** — The original "I am his and he is mine" — the pre-fall mutual belonging of husband and wife as covenant complement; the Song's language of mutual possession echoes this foundational union before disruption entered.
- **Hosea 2:14–20** — The LORD's resolve to "allure" Israel back after her unfaithfulness and to betroth her again in steadfast love and faithfulness; the structure of chapter 6 (crisis → renewed delight → restored belonging) mirrors the covenant-renewal pattern Hosea describes.

- **Deuteronomy 7:6** — Israel as the LORD’s “treasured possession” (*segullah*) above all peoples; the lover’s declaration that the beloved is unrivaled among queens and concubines carries the same weight of singular election and prizing.
- **Ephesians 5:25–32** — Paul’s explicit identification of Christ’s love for the Church as the reality to which human covenant love points; the lover’s overwhelming, self-giving delight in the beloved in chapter 6 is a shadow of Christ’s delight in His Church.
- **Revelation 19:7–9** — The marriage supper of the Lamb — the eschatological fulfillment of what the Song portrays in type: the bride made ready, the Bridegroom’s delight consummated, all disruption finally resolved in permanent, celebrated union.

Aim: To press upon readers that covenant love — whether human marriage or the believer’s relationship with Christ — is not destroyed by failure and disruption but is designed to reassert itself with renewed intensity, calling them to rest in the security of mutual belonging rather than performing their way back into favor.

Content Table

Verse(s)	Content	Notes
6:1	Daughters of Jerusalem ask where the beloved’s lover has gone so they can seek him with her	Picks up directly from 5:9–16; the daughters are now enlisted in the search
6:2	The beloved answers with confidence: he has gone to his garden to pasture and gather lilies	Crisis resolves not with dramatic reunion but with quiet, settled knowledge of where he is
6:3	“I am my beloved’s and my beloved is mine” — mutual belonging reaffirmed	Echoes 2:16; the covenantal formula of mutual possession; the heart of the chapter
6:4	Lover addresses the beloved: “You are beautiful as Tirzah, lovely as Jerusalem, awesome as an army with banners”	Tirzah = ancient Canaanite royal city; Jerusalem = Israelite royal city; both = capitals of splendor and power
6:5a	He tells her to look away — her eyes overwhelm him	Erotic intensity; the beloved’s gaze is overpowering

Verse(s)	Content	Notes
6:5b–7	Repeated praise: her hair, teeth, cheeks — nearly identical to 4:1–3	Deliberate repetition; love’s return speaks the same language of admiration; restoration to pre-crisis intimacy
6:8–9	Among sixty queens, eighty concubines, and countless maidens — she is unrivaled; even the queens praise her	The beloved is singular, incomparable; election language; she is <i>the</i> one
6:10	“Who is this who looks down like the dawn, beautiful as the moon, bright as the sun, awesome as an army with banners?”	The exclamation of the watching world; her beauty is cosmic in scale — dawn, moon, sun
6:11	The speaker (beloved?) goes to the nut garden to see the blossoms of the valley	Transition; garden = place of renewal, spring = season of love’s re-awakening (cf. 2:10–13)
6:12	“Before I was aware, my soul set me among the chariots of my noble people” (ESV)	Most difficult verse in the chapter; likely describes unexpected transport or overwhelm — joy carrying her beyond herself
6:13	Daughters of Jerusalem call: “Return, return, O Shulammite”; the lover responds: “Why would you look upon the Shulammite, as upon a dance before two armies?”	“Shulammite” — possibly feminine of Solomon, or from Shunem; the lover’s response may be protective of her, or it may be inviting the watching company to see her dance

Divisions Table

Division	Verses	Label
1	6:1–3	Crisis Resolved: Confident Knowledge and Reaffirmed Belonging
2	6:4–10	Overwhelmed by Beauty: The Lover’s Return of Praise
3	6:11–12	Garden and Transport:

Division	Verses	Label
4	6:13	Renewal Found in Unexpected Joy Called and Seen: The Shulammite Before the Watching World

Subject Sentence & Primary Claim (*restated*)

Subject Sentence: Covenant love reasserts itself — crisis resolved in renewed mutual belonging and overwhelming delight.

Primary Claim: God is demonstrating through this passage that covenant love is not destroyed by disruption but emerges from crisis with renewed intensity — and calling those who belong to Him to receive His delight and rest in the security of mutual belonging, even after failure.

Applications (Five)

1. Receive the assurance that failure does not end the covenant. (*Mind/belief*) The beloved's crisis in chapter 5 — her failure to open the door, her painful searching, her public shaming — could have been the end. Chapter 6 proves it was not. The lover returns not with accusation but with overwhelming praise. Many believers live in the aftermath of spiritual failure convinced that God's delight in them has been permanently diminished — that they must earn their way back before He will speak warmly again. This text confronts that belief directly: the covenant is not contingent on unbroken performance. The lover's return with the same language of admiration he used before the crisis (compare 6:5–7 with 4:1–3) is the text's claim that grace restores, not merely tolerates. The application is a cognitive reframing: you are not on probation after failure; you are still the one in whom the Beloved delights.

2. Practice the settled confidence of “I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine.” (*Affections/worship*) The beloved's answer in 6:2–3 is not anxious searching — it is calm knowledge. She knows where he is. She knows she is his. This kind of settled, worshipful confidence — not presumption, but covenant-grounded rest — is what the text is modeling and calling forth. Many believers relate to God with chronic anxiety about their standing, monitoring their spiritual performance to assess whether they are still “in.” The beloved's posture here is the antidote: not passivity, but a deep-rooted assurance that shapes the emotional register of the relationship. The application is a call to orient one's affective life around the covenant formula — to practice saying, with the beloved, “I am His and He is mine” — and to let that confession settle the anxious heart.

3. Pursue your beloved as the one in whom you are uniquely known and uniquely prized. (*Will/behavior*) The lover's declaration in 6:8–9 — that among all the queens and concubines, the beloved is the one, the unrivaled — is not flattery; it is the logic of covenant election. He is not comparing and choosing; he has chosen, and the choice is irrevocable. Within marriage, this text calls spouses to a concrete behavioral pattern: pursue your spouse as the *one*, not as *one of many*. This means deliberate, specific, unrivaled attention — not the generic appreciation of a good relationship, but the particular, observant, overwhelming delight the lover lavishes on the beloved. What specific, unrepeatable thing about your spouse are you naming and celebrating this week that only you can see?

4. Do not reduce spiritual restoration to duty — let it be delight. (*Affections/worship*) A recurring failure in Christian piety after seasons of failure or distance from God is to return to duty rather than to delight — to resume the disciplines without re-engaging the heart. The lover in chapter 6 does not return with a contract; he returns with a song. The beloved does not restore the relationship with a checklist; she names where he is and affirms that she is his. The application is a challenge to examine how you are relating to God after a season of spiritual dryness or failure: are you returning to God through performance (trying to re-earn the relationship) or through the kind of open-hearted return the text models? The Song models restoration as renewed delight in the person of the beloved, not resumed compliance with expectations.

5. Tell the watching world who the Beloved is — and be unashamed. (*Will/behavior*) Chapter 6 opens with the daughters of Jerusalem asking after the lover, and it closes with them calling to the Shulammite and the lover responding with extravagant public praise. The beloved's description of her lover in chapter 5 is what prompted the daughters to want to seek him (5:9ff.). Here that seeking produces a public moment — the Shulammite is named, called, and publicly celebrated. Believers have a witness function: how we speak about Christ — our delight in Him, our confidence in His love, our specific and vivid description of what He is like — shapes whether those around us want to seek Him. A vague or duty-laden account of the Christian life does not make people want to seek the Beloved. A real, particular, exuberant account of who He is and how He loves does.

Theological Importance

Theological Importance: Song of Solomon 6 teaches that covenant love — love that has made binding promises of mutual belonging — is fundamentally resilient. It is not a fragile contract voided by failure or distance; it is a committed, electing love that reasserts itself after disruption with renewed intensity. The lover's return with overwhelming praise (6:4–10) after the crisis of chapter 5 reveals something about the character of the God whose covenant is modeled here: His love is not diminished by our failures but remains overwhelming in its specificity and delight. The covenant formula “I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine” (6:3) — which echoes the biblical covenant refrain “I will be your God

and you will be my people” — establishes that belonging is mutual, irrevocable, and the foundation of all peace. The beloved is not merely included; she is singularly, uniquely, overwhelmingly prized — which is the logic of election: not that God could not love others, but that He has chosen *this one* and His choosing is whole and complete.

Reformed Theological Significance

Reformed Theological Significance: For Reformed theology, Song of Solomon 6 functions as a poetic embodiment of the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints — not as a proof text, but as a portrayal. The covenant is not undone by the beloved’s failure (5:3–8); the lover’s delight is not conditional on her unbroken faithfulness. This is a portrait of grace operating within covenant: the love is prior, the election is irrevocable, and the disruption becomes the occasion not for judgment but for renewed, intensified delight. The typological resonance with Christ and the Church (Ephesians 5:25–32) gives this chapter its full Reformed freight: Christ’s love for the Church does not vary with her performance, His delight in her is not diminished by her failures, and His return — in the imagery of Revelation 19 — will not be with accusation but with overwhelming celebration. The Reformed gospel of unconditional election and persevering grace finds one of its most vivid and humanly accessible portraits in this chapter’s movement from crisis to restored, intensified, public delight.

Main Takeaway

The crisis did not end the covenant. The lover came back — and he came back *singing*. This is what covenant love does: it does not recalculate after failure; it returns with overwhelming delight in the one it has chosen. If you belong to Christ, you are not on probation — you are the one in whom He delights, the one He calls unrivaled, the one He is coming back for with a song. Stop living as though His love for you is something you maintain. Rest in what He has said: *I am my beloved’s and my beloved is mine*.

Preaching/Teaching Pitfalls

- **Allegorizing every detail at the expense of the human register.** The temptation with the Song — especially in a chapter-by-chapter teaching context — is to immediately and mechanically translate every image into a spiritual correspondence: the nut garden = the church, the blossoms = revival, Tirzah = holiness, etc. This suppresses the text’s genuine celebration of embodied human love and produces artificial, unpersuasive applications. Receive the human love story fully — its beauty, its tension, its resolution — and let the canonical-theological resonances emerge from that foundation rather than displacing it.

- **Avoiding the erotic register.** Pastors sometimes become so uncomfortable with the explicitly erotic dimensions of the Song that they skip past them, spiritualize them, or preface them with so many qualifications that the text's own tone is neutralized. Chapter 6 includes the lover being overwhelmed by his beloved's eyes, the repeated catalog of her physical beauty, and images of intimate reunion. These are not obstacles to the theological teaching — they *are* the theological teaching. A preacher who cannot inhabit the text's delight in embodied love cannot communicate what the text is claiming.
- **Preaching only marital application and missing the Christ-and-Church dimension.** The opposite error from over-allegory is staying entirely at the human-relationship level, reducing the text to marriage advice. Both registers are real and both matter. The beloved's confidence that she is her beloved's and he is hers (6:3) applies to covenant marriage *and* to the believer's relationship with Christ — and both applications should be made, proportionately and clearly.
- **Over-resolving the textual difficulties in 6:11–12.** Verses 11–12 are among the most obscure in the Song. Preachers who confidently assert a specific interpretation of “my soul set me among the chariots of my noble people” without acknowledging the genuine difficulty are misleading their congregations and spending homiletical capital on a verse the passage does not require for its primary claim. Acknowledge the difficulty, name what seems most plausible given the surrounding context (unexpected transport of joy, renewal in the garden), and move on. Do not let the most obscure verses in the chapter carry the sermon's weight.
- **Missing the post-crisis structure — preaching the chapter without preaching the crisis.** Chapter 6 can only be understood in light of chapter 5. The beloved's failure to open the door, her painful searching, her suffering in the streets — all of this is the context that makes chapter 6's restoration so powerful. A sermon on chapter 6 that does not briefly recall the preceding crisis will produce a thin celebration without the theological weight of grace operating after failure. The glory of the lover's return (6:4–10) is inseparable from what he is returning *after*.
- **Turning the beloved's confidence (6:3) into a technique rather than a gift.** “I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine” is sometimes preached as a practice to adopt — an affirmation to repeat until you feel it. The text presents it not as a technique but as a settled knowledge that flows from being genuinely known and loved. The application should not be “say this until you believe it” but “this is what is already true of you in Christ — receive it, rest in it, let it govern how you live.” The confidence is a consequence of covenant, not a method for achieving it.