

**Solomon and Sinatra: The Song of Songs and Romance in the Church**  
**Robert Case**  
**A Sunday School Class**  
**Faith Presbyterian Church**  
**Tacoma, Washington**  
**2016**

**Part 6**

**“The Nearness of You”**

The movie song, "The Nearness of You" was written in 1938 by [Hoagy Carmichael](#) and [Ned Washington](#) for the film *Romance in the Dark*, starring John Barrymore. The lyrics tell of one lover “thrilling,” “delighting,” “and “enchanting” another lover. The first big-selling version of the song was recorded in 1940 by the [Glenn Miller Orchestra](#), with vocals by [Ray Eberle](#). Other popular versions were recorded by [Kay Kyser](#), [Dinah Shore](#) and more recently, [Diana Krall](#). [Sheena Easton](#) sang the song in the 1993 terrible movie *Indecent Proposal*, starring Robert Redford and Demi Moore. A live performance of the song was given by pianist/singer Norah Jones at the Steve Jobs Memorial/Celebration of Life in 2011.

“It's not the pale moon that excites me, that thrills and delights me, oh no, it's just the nearness of you. It isn't your sweet conversation that brings this sensation, oh no, it's just the nearness of you. When you're in my arms and I feel you so close to me all my wildest dreams come true. I need no soft lights to enchant me, if you'll only grant me the right to hold you ever so tight, and to feel in the night, the nearness of you.”

(“The Nearness of You” performed by singer/pianist, Norah Jones)(3:07)  
[https://www.amazon.com/The-Nearness-Of-You/dp/B000SXIMYA/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?s=dmusic&ie=UTF8&qid=1470436295&sr=1-1&keywords=The+Nearness+of+You+Norah+Jones](https://www.amazon.com/The-Nearness-Of-You/dp/B000SXIMYA/ref=sr_1_1?s=dmusic&ie=UTF8&qid=1470436295&sr=1-1&keywords=The+Nearness+of+You+Norah+Jones)

**“Lover”**

The operatic-like 1935 aria “Lover” by Rogers and Hart is from the film *Love Me Tonight*. The lyrics were written for Jeanette MacDonald to sing of her lover to her horse as she gallops across the countryside in a buggy. So we hear Mss MacDonald shout “whoa” and “Not too fast” and other horsey comments. Mr. Rogers has the soaring ballad music ascending and descending in a mock operatic style. It is not much of a song and musicians took their time in liking it, but the public liked immediately because it is melodic. The Paul Whiteman Orchestra had a #3 hit with the song in 1932 and 20 years later, in 1953, singer Peggy Lee ran the song to #3 on the Hit Parade. This is Mss Lee’s song but I like Jeanette MacDonald’s version.

“Lover, when I'm near you and I hear you speak my name softly in my ear you breathe a flame. Lover, when we're dancing keep on glancing in my eyes till love's own entrancing music dies. All of my future is in you. Your every plan I design. Hey lover, please be tender when your tender fears depart, lover, I surrender to my heart. I say "The devil is in you" and to resist you I try But if you didn't continue, I would die. Lover, when you find me will you blind me with your glow? make me cast behind me all my.. WHOA! Kiss

me He'll be saying gently swaying I'll obey like two children playing in the.. HEY! He'll be my lord and my master I'll be a slave to the last. he'll make my heart go faster- NOT TOO FAST! Lover, when you take me and awake me I will know, lover you can make me love you so."

("Lover" performed by Peggy Lee) (3:19)

[https://www.amazon.com/Lover/dp/B008B1D08E/ref=sr\\_1\\_5?s=dmusic&ie=UTF8&qid=1474671682&sr=1-5&keywords=lover+peggy+lee](https://www.amazon.com/Lover/dp/B008B1D08E/ref=sr_1_5?s=dmusic&ie=UTF8&qid=1474671682&sr=1-5&keywords=lover+peggy+lee)

### **"Froggie Went A'Courting"**

"Froggie Went A'Courting" is a Scottish/English [folk song](#). Its first known appearance is in 1548, however the oldest known musical version appears in 1611. Sigmund Spaeth claims that the original version of this song refers to [François, Duke of Anjou's](#) wooing of [Elizabeth I of England](#) (*A History of Popular Music in America*, 1948), however, this was in 1579 and the original Scottish version was already published. Evelyn Wells, however, suggests that the original may have been satirically altered in 1580 at the height of the unpopular courtship between Anjou and Elizabeth. Albert Jack states another theory: In 1547 the Scottish Queen Consort, Mary of Guise, under attack from Henry VIII, sought to marry her daughter Princess Mary (later Mary Queen of Scots), "Mrs. Mouse" to the 3 year old French Prince Louis, the "frog". The song resurfaced a few years later when another French wooing caused concern -- that of the Duke of Anjou and Queen Elizabeth I in 1579. Elizabeth even nicknamed Anjou, her favorite suitor, "the frog". Jumping ahead to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, in 1941, the German composer [Paul Hindemith](#) wrote a series of variations called "Frog, He Went a Courting" for Cello and Piano. The song has been recorded by many folk singers but most prominently by [Burl Ives](#) in his kid-friendly version, in which Frog and Miss Mousie are [wed](#).

"Froggie went a courtin and he did ride. Froggie went a courtin and he did ride. A sword and a pistol by his side. He went down to Missie Mousie's door. He went down to Missie Mousie's door, where he had been many times before. "Missie Mouse, are you within?" "Missie Mouse, are you within?" "Yes, kind sir, I sit and spin." Took Missie Mouse upon his knee. Took Missie Mouse upon his knee, said, "Missie Mouse, will you marry me?" Without my Uncle Rat's consent. Without my Uncle Rat's consent, I wouldn't marry the president. Uncle Rat laughed and shook his fat sides. Uncle Rat laughed and shook his fat sides, to think his niece would become a bride. When Uncle Rat did his consent. When Uncle Rat did his consent, the weasel wrote the publishment. Next came in was a bumblebee. Next came in was a bumblebee, danced a jig with a two-leg flea. They all did hoot and the birds they sang. They all did hoot and the birds they sang and through the woods the music rang. Where will the wedding breakfast be? Where will the wedding breakfast be? He went down yonder in a hollow tree. What will the wedding breakfast be"? What will the wedding breakfast be? Two green beans and a black-eyed pea. They all went sailing across the lake. They all went sailing across the lake and got swallowed up by a big black snake. There's bread and cheese upon the shelf. There's bread and cheese upon the shelf. If you want anymore you can take it yourself."

("Mr. Froggie Went A-Courtin' " by Burl Ives) (3:03) <https://www.amazon.com/Sings-Little-White-Childrens->

[Favorites/dp/B00138H0F6/ref=sr\\_1\\_fkmr1\\_2?s=dmusic&ie=UTF8&qid=1474671341&sr=1-2-fkmr1&keywords=froggie+went+a+courting+burl+ives](http://Favorites/dp/B00138H0F6/ref=sr_1_fkmr1_2?s=dmusic&ie=UTF8&qid=1474671341&sr=1-2-fkmr1&keywords=froggie+went+a+courting+burl+ives)

In New Testament Greek we do have two words which come close to “romance” - *phileo* and *eros*. We like to talk about *agape* love because that is divine love. But *phileo* and *eros* have their place in our lives and should not get a bad rap. *Phileo* love is used only a couple of times to describe love between God and Man (John 20:2; Titus 3:4). It is almost always used to describe “tender affections” or “kindness” between individuals – *philanthropia* (Acts 27:3). The word has even been translated “kiss,” but in two terrible contexts - the treachery of Jacob towards Isaac (LXX Genesis 27:27) and Judas towards Jesus (Matthew 26:48). The Greek term *philedonos* (meaning “loving pleasure”) is in and of itself, natural. It is only when one loves pleasure more than God that it is condemned by Paul to Timothy (2 Timothy 3:4). So, *phileo* is a good word in the proper context and should describe our actions towards each other, particularly husbands toward their wives.

*Eros* is the Greek for “love passionately” or “burning desire.” While it is never used in the New Testament, *eros* is used chastely in:

\*the Greek translation (LXX) of Esther 2:17,

“Now the king was attracted (*eros* = love) to Esther more than to any of the other women, and she won his favor and approval more than any of the other virgins.”

\*Proverbs 4:6,

“Do not forsake wisdom, and she will protect you; love (*eros*) her, and she will watch over you.”

\*the Apocrypha’s *Wisdom of Solomon* 8:2,

“I loved (*eros*) [wisdom] and sought her out from my youth, I desired to make her my spouse, and I was a lover (*eros*) of [wisdom’s] beauty.”

All perfectly honorable and commendable circumstances.

We believers do not benefit from unbiblical modesty or turning away from explicit passages in God’s word because we find those passages, whether about violence or sex, uncomfortable and awkward. As this congregation has embarked on a ministry to combat and eradicate pornography in our midst it is vital that we understand God’s approval of married couples enjoying each other’s differently endowed bodies. The *Song of Songs* celebrates this difference. In our laudatory efforts to extirpate sexual sin from this church, we must not revert to Victorian prudishness. In the little booklet in the church narthex called, “Teens and Sex,” Dr. Paul Tripp writes,

“As Christians, we say that sex is a wonderful gift from God, yet we are strangely silent on the topic and uncomfortable in the rare instances when it is discussed. This leads to a lack of sexual balance, a lack of openness, and a lack of clear, practical sexual education. Sex tends to get placed outside the boundaries of the normative Christian worldview.”

The *Song of Songs* squarely places sex in the midst of a robust Christian worldview. But it has always posed problems for the Church.

1) It is one of the three books in the Old Testament that does not mention the name of Yahweh (along with Esther and Ecclesiastes), except for maybe a contested indirect reference to God in SS 8:6 (“the very flame of the LORD,” but better, “a god-like flame” or “a mighty flame”), or Israel, the temple, the sacrificial system, rituals, divine laws and ordinances, the Promised Land or other Old Testament Church sacred terminology. It is never quoted in the New Testament. The book of love is almost a completely secular book, in fact, some Old Testament scholars (Carol Meyers, *Discovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context*, 1988) have called the book “the most unbiblical book in the Bible.”

2) There is a problem with authorship, which can’t be conclusively determined. We simply do not know who wrote the book of love (a major Intervarsity Press commentary on the *Song* has the subtitle: *The Lyrics of Love*, Tom Gledhill, 1994). For centuries the book was called “Song of Solomon” based primarily on 1 Kings 4:27-33, along with the *Song*’s references to certain Solomonic cities (Kedar, Engadi, Sharon, Tirzah, Jerusalem, Hesbon, Bath-ribbim, Carmel), a harem and language similar to Ecclesiastes, which does bears more proof of Solomon’s authorship. Many of us grew up learning “Song of Solomon” as the title of the book. It was what the King Jimmy called it. In fact, a prime reason the book was considered canonical was the connection to Solomon in verse 1 (“The Song of Songs which is Solomon’s”). It has only been in my lifetime that the translators and commentators of the Bible have uniformly entitled this book of love, “Song of Songs,” and Solomonic authorship is no longer affirmed. If Solomon didn’t write the book, who did and when was it written? Most recent scholarship suggests that because of the similarity with ANE love poems the book was written about 500 BC. Additionally, the author or authors or compilers are unknown so there is much mystery surrounding this wondrous book of love.

3) But most importantly, the *Song*’s straightforward erotic content is embarrassing and problematic for us Christians, and has been for centuries. Let me dwell on this criticism for moment. The first biblical scholar to treat the book of love as a collection of human love poems was Theodore of Mopsuestia (350–428), a rather minor figure in church history. Theodore argued at the Council of Constantinople in 381 that because of its erotic approach to human love, the *Song of Solomon* should be excluded from the canon. He was subsequently condemned by the Council and later excommunicated in the 6<sup>th</sup> century by the Roman Catholic Church. More in our tradition, in 1544, French pastor and theologian, Sabastian Castellio, raised similar objections to the canonicity of the *Song* with similar advice, and he ended up being banned from Geneva by John Calvin for the same reason as Theodore. As late as 1879 the liberal Lutheran theologian Edouard Reuss was arguing that the book was immoral and should be excluded from the canon (*History of the Canon of the Holy Scriptures of the Christian Church*, 1884).

### **“The Book of Love”**

To lighten up the tone a bit, in 1957 a rollicking song called, “The Book of Love” was written by Warren Davis, George Malone and Charles Patrick of the Monotones, and it soared to #5 on *Billboard*’s “Top 100” chart and #3 for the R & B chart. Lead singer Charles Patrick heard the [Pepsodent](#) toothpaste commercial with the line “wonder where the yellow went”. From there he got the idea for the line, “I wonder, wonder, wonder who, who wrote the book of love.” The song then asks the rhetorical question was “the book of love written by someone above?” We answer, “Yes, God wrote the book of love and its called, *Song of Songs*.” The Monotones recorded the song for Mascot

records in 1957, but the small record company could not cope with its popularity, and so the song was reissued on [Chess Records](#) in 1958. 30 years later, in 1988, the song became the theme song for [The Newlywed Game](#) on ABC where “making whoopee” was used as a euphemism for “making love.” The song is featured on the soundtrack of the films, [Book of Love \(1990\)](#), [American Graffiti \(1973\)](#), [Christine \(1983\)](#), [Stand by Me \(1986\)](#), and [Parental Guidance \(2012\)](#), and is referenced in the lyrics to Don McLean's iconic, "[American Pie](#)" and in the lyrics of Led Zeppelin's "[Rock and Roll](#)". In short, the song is a classic of sophisticated lyrics and intricate melody which you will hear. Incidentally, the "boom" part of the song was a result of a kid kicking a ball against the garage while the Monotones were rehearsing the song in 1957 in the building. The boom sounded good, so they added it to the song.

Oh, I wonder, wonder who But who knew who Who wrote the book of love Tell me, tell me, tell me Who wrote the book of love Well, I've got to know the answer Is it someone from above Oh, I wonder, wonder who But who knew who Who wrote the book of love. Baby, baby, baby I love you, yes I do And it says so in this book of love That I'm the one that's true Oh, I wonder, wonder who But who knew who Who wrote the book of love. Chapter one says you love her You love her with all your heart Chapter two says you'll never You never, never... never gonna part Chapter three, remember The meaning of romance In chapter four you break up Oh, won't you give me just one more chance. Oh, I wonder, wonder who But who knew who Who wrote the book of love.

(“The Book of Love” performed by the Monotones)(2:24) [https://www.amazon.com/Book-Of-Love/dp/B004PTMW9O/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?s=dmusic&ie=UTF8&qid=1474671922&sr=1-1&keywords=the+book+of+love+monotones](https://www.amazon.com/Book-Of-Love/dp/B004PTMW9O/ref=sr_1_1?s=dmusic&ie=UTF8&qid=1474671922&sr=1-1&keywords=the+book+of+love+monotones)

### **“The Book of Love”**

“The Book of Love” is a 1999 pop song written by Stephin Merritt and sung by Peter Gabriel.

The book of love is long and boring No one can lift the damn thing It's full of charts and facts and figures And instructions for dancing. But I I love it when you read to me And you You can read me anything. The book of love has music in it In fact that's where music comes from Some of it is just transcendental Some of it is just really dumb. But I I love it when you sing to me And you You can sing me anything. The book of love is long and boring And written very long ago It's full of flowers and heart-shaped boxes And things we're all too young to know. But I I love it when you give me things And you You ought to give me wedding rings. And I I love it when you give me things And you You ought to give me wedding rings You ought to give me wedding rings.

Over the centuries of interpretation of the *Song of Songs* there have been several ways of interpreting the book, but basically there are only two ways: Allegorical and Literal.

The allegorical interpretation depends on a sanctified imagination in which the reader illumined by the Holy Spirit sees shadow meaning in the text. Yahweh sometimes speaks of Himself as the husband of the Old Testament Church (Isaiah 54:5; Hosea 2:16, 19) and rejoiced in the Church as His bride (Isaiah 62:4-5). Christ is represented as the bridegroom of the New Testament Church (Matthew 25:1; Romans 7:4; 2 Corinthians 11:2; Ephesians 5:32) and the

Church as the bride of Christ (Revelation 19:7; 21:2, 9). For the allegorists, Psalm 45 is seen as the nuptial key to understanding the *Song*.

Of all the books in the Bible, the *Song of Songs* is the most poetic and the most mysterious. The difficulty of understanding the book has caused generations of lay Christians to abandon the effort to comprehend its meaning, and preachers to ignore its contents in sermons and teaching. Frankly, one of the reasons I felt free to teach the *Song* in this congregation was because Dr. Rayburn plunges ahead and preaches on controversial and difficult passages in the Scriptures. As Tremper Longman, formerly of Westminster Seminary, has said, for 2000 years the Church has been sidetracked by neo-platonism to “de-eroticize the Bible.” We want our Bible to be G-rated, when parts of it could be R-rated, or more explicit, like the *Song of Songs*. Indeed, the *Song* is an adult book and not appropriate for children. Ancient Jewish tradition had it that “no one should even hold the book in his hands, who has not reached a full and ripe age.” One scholar (Richard Hess) thanked his publisher – Baker, a Reformed publishing house - for printing and distributing his commentary on the *Song* because of the steamy nature of his literal interpretation of the book.

Over-shadowing the allegorical or typological interpretation is the desire to get away from a literal interpretation of naturalism or eroticism. One Old Testament scholar has written, “To the *eros* of the poem was artificially substituted a disembodied *agape*” (Andre La Cocque, *Romance She Wrote: A Hermeneutical Essay on Song of Songs*, 1998). The allegorical interpretation sees the book as describing the relationship or type of relationship between Yahweh or Christ and the individual or the Church (body of Christ) or Israel.

The first allegorists were the Septuagint Greek translators of the Old Testament around 132 BC. Since all translations are interpretations up to a point, it is instructive to note that when the Hebrew word *ahab* for secular “love” was found in the *Song*, the LXX Greek translators substituted the Greek word *agape* meaning “divine love” (19 times) when *eros* (0 times) or even *phileo* (2 times: SS 1:2; 8:1), meaning “tender affections,” would have been preferable given the tenor of the book. But the LXX translators wanted to see the *Song* as a treatise on the divine love between God and Man, and not secular love between a woman and a man.

To be fair to the allegorists, the Church has always been confused with passages in the Bible which seem to imply that legitimate sexual activity between a man and a woman causes spiritual contamination and defilement.

\*Exodus 19:14-15, “So Moses went down from the mountain to the people and consecrated the people; and they washed their garments. And he said to the people, ‘Be ready for the third day; do not go near a woman.’”

\*Leviticus 15:18, “If a man lies with a woman and has an emission of semen, both of them shall bathe themselves in water and be unclean until the evening.”

\*1 Samuel 19:4, “And the priest answered David, ‘I have no common bread on hand, but there is holy bread, if the young men have kept themselves from women.’”

Coming off of platonic and neo-platonic philosophy in which the physical is downplayed, the early great theologian and Church Father, Origen (184-253), was a prominent allegorist of

the book and he provided cover for subsequent allegorists like Augustine and Bernard of Clairvaux.

Augustine wrote in the *City of God*,

“The *Canticle of Canticles* (Case note: *canticle* is Latin for song) sings a sort of spiritual rapture experienced by holy souls contemplating the nuptial relationship between Christ and King and his queen-city, the Church.”

Augustine was at least 60 and perhaps 70 years old at the time.

Bernard preached a series of sermons on the *Song* beginning in 1135 setting forth his allegorist view. He was 45 years old at the time.

Luther and Calvin are interesting commentators because they were typically literalist, even in some tough passages, but both pulled their punches when it came to the *Song of Songs*. Martin Luther believed the *Song* spoke of the relationship of God and Solomon in a political allegory. He was 47 years old when he lectured at Wittenberg on this subject.

Calvin followed the medieval exegesis that the *Song* was a poetic prophecy of the marriage between Christ and his Church. In his commentary on Psalm 45, Calvin writes,

“But as the word ‘loves’ is sometimes taken in a bad sense, and as even conjugal affection itself, however well regulated, has always some irregularity of the flesh mingled with it; . . . the subject here treated of is not some obscene or unchaste amours, but that under what is here said of Solomon as a type, the holy and divine union of Christ and his Church is described and set forth.” (*Commentary on Psalm 45*)

If Calvin wrote his commentaries on Psalms in 1557, which we think he did, he would have been 48 at the time.

John Cotton (1584-1652), the great 17<sup>th</sup> century American Puritan theologian and pastor, would follow suit a hundred years later in his 1648 commentary on the *Song* (*A Brief Exposition of the Whole Book of Canticles, or Song of Solomon*), thus helping to cement for centuries the accepted way of interpreting the *Song of Solomon* in our circles. Cotton was 64 years old when he wrote his screed about the *Song*.

John Wesley (1703-1791), 100 years after Cotton, wrote strongly against the literal and plain reading of the *Song of Songs* (*Explanatory Notes upon the Old Testament*, 1760):

“The description of this bridegroom and bride is such as could not with decency be used or meant concerning Solomon and Pharaoh’s daughter; that many expressions and descriptions, if applied to them, would be absurd and monstrous; and that it therefore follows that *Song of Songs* is to be understood allegorically concerning that spiritual love and marriage, which is between Christ and his church”



Wesley was 57 when he wrote his *Explanatory Notes*

All these great men were 45 years old or older, when they tackled the *Song* and I'll come back to this age issue a little later.

Currently, in a modern allegorizing commentary (2011), Paul Griffiths explicitly follows Origen when he writes,

“The romance and desire of the Song, are not only, and perhaps not at all, about two unnamed lovers; [the romance and desire] are also, and perhaps principally, and perhaps even only, about the desire of the Lord for his Israel, for his church, for Mary, and for you and me.” (*Song of Song*, Brazos Commentary)

The great and insurmountable problem with allegorizing the book is that there is no objective standard by which the accuracy of the interpretation can be measured. Allegorizing leads to numerous, differing interpretations that are limited only by the ingenuity of the commentator. Now there are parts of the Bible that can be allegorized (e.g. Isaiah 5:1-7; Ezekiel 16:1-4ff; Ezekiel 23:1-4ff; parables in the Gospels; Galatians 4:21-31 where Paul says, **“these things may be taken figuratively,” vs. 24**), but only because the biblical writers explain what the allegory is. Jesus explains his parables to us (Mark 4:33-34).

Let me give you a brief, and I think incomprehensible, current example of the allegorical approach to the *Song* argued by Dr. Griffiths in his contemporary and very erudite commentary. Griffiths gives the allegorical approach away in this passage, the translation of which is taken from Jerome's 4<sup>th</sup> century Latin Vulgate Bible:

SS 1:2-3, “Let me be kissed with your mouth's kiss for your loves are better than wine, fragrant with your best ointments.”

Here are his comments:

“The Lord, therefore, your scriptural imagination can tell you, wants to kiss your lips with a passion, to redden them with the redness of his passion for you. The “scarlet thread” of the beloved's lips, stained by the blood of the Lord's passion and inflamed by the heat of his kisses, belongs to the Lord's church and, by extension, to each of its members. The Lord's death on the cross is the deepest kiss of humanity's unclean lips (reflecting Isaiah 6:5), extending to all the embrace given to Abraham. Christians reciprocate this kiss most fully here below in drinking the blood-red wine of the Eucharist. The stain of that wine on our lips is the mark of the Lord's blood on our bodies; it is also the mark of his lips on ours, cleaning them with the purifying flame of his passion.”

There is no Scriptural guidelines from the Lord for the “scriptural imagination” allegorizing the *Song*. We're dangerously on our own. From the Patristics through the 20<sup>th</sup> century – and even into the 21<sup>st</sup> century – the godly erotic message lying at the heart of a plain and straight-forward reading of the *Song* has been de-sexed by godly commentators. This speaks



to the power of sex in the human mind, particularly the male mind, who write most of the commentaries.