



BIBLE IN A YEAR 2020



Summary

These poems are a celebration of love. We see it through extravagant, joyous exchanges between a king and his bride. Through their creative expressions of passion, longing and fulfilment, we can be inspired by God's love for us and the way he has made us to love and bring out the best in each other.

Bern Leckie

Monday September 21: Song of Songs 1-4

Crazy in love

Every day we're reading or listening to part of the Bible together and sharing thoughts with you. Today it's Bern Leckie:

What did I like about today's reading?

People who haven't read the Bible think it's all "thou shalt" and "thou shalt not", maybe with a few nice stories for kids thrown in. They're not expecting this! Were you?

It's not hard to guess the theme of this book from the first few words. It's all about love, and I love how it plunges deep into romantic fantasy from beginning to end. It's such a contrast with all that serious religious, legal and political stuff. And it's not really for kids. If something sounds like it could have a double meaning for intimate, sensual passion, go ahead and enjoy that image because you're probably right.

Admittedly, some of it sounds a bit odd after translating across cultures and centuries. "Your hair is like a flock of goats" is one of my favourite smooth lines (it reminds me of a Monty Python sketch), and look at your teeth – they come in pairs! (Listen, if you can't laugh in the bedroom, there's something wrong.) But let's go with the flow here. Clearly, she loves him, and he loves her, very, very much.

And there is clearly an emotional journey too, from the nervousness of crossing a threshold, moving from personal concerns to shared love, to the exhilaration of a loving connection in a committed couple, and the frustration and pain of separation from true love.

We are considering something very big and powerful here. No, not just sexual desire! I mean whole-of-life love which overwhelms people, connecting them with God's creation and his love and passion too.

What did it show me about Father God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit?

God is love. He made it, he supplies it, he understands our desires for it. He wants us to experience the best possible love, which requires us to recognise him and his work. God made us for love, not just to get carried away by loving feelings, but to experience love as an overwhelming driving force in our lives. What else drives our creativity and passion like this?

What am I going to do differently as a result?

Expressing love to my wife is extremely important - not just with words, but with my whole self. I will always want to get better at this. I am glad that God guides us towards this.

Who am I going to share this with?

My wife Helen.

Tuesday September 22: Song of Songs 5-8

A million love songs later...

Today Bern Leckie writes:

What did I like about today's reading?

Are you enjoying this as much as I am? Being honest, and as you can probably tell from yesterday, I do find this book a bit embarrassingly laugh-it-off awkward at times. Maybe that's just me being a bloke, but I think it's also because it invites, even demands, a different kind of engagement from most of the rest of the Bible. That's not a bad thing! Just different.

It's not an historical document, so we don't need to fuss about who this woman was or which ivory tower most resembles her neck. It's not an instructional letter, so relax, you can leave your pomegranates in the kitchen.

So what is it? And what has it got to do with us? Most simply, it's poetry and songs about love, inspired for us by the author of love, who knows we love to love. He knows what we keep listening to on the radio. There's a constant theme in our minds – our desire to love and be loved – and a constant note in this book. It's love. It's only love, doing its thing.

These poems have long been enjoyed at weddings, but I think God has inspired them for more than that. They are for us too, today. What I've most enjoyed about them is feeling around for the resonant bits which seem true about love and commitment. The way love helps us see the world differently, full of colour and possibility. The way love inspires us to dig deep and express the best of ourselves creatively. The way love forgives when this comes out as "Your teeth are like a flock of sheep." (Twice. Seriously?)

I'm also loving that God-inspired love reveals how we are made to fit together and complement each other. While he is a king and she has a very different background and status, nothing in these poems suggests that he is more important than she is. They both have vineyards to bring to each other, biblical symbols of a life's work of care, cultivation and value. We live in an unequal society, but love from God brings empowerment, sets our expectations higher, and brings out the best in ourselves and each other. How great is that?

What did it show me about Father God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit?

God wants us to know the joy and life-changing benefits of love. We might hope to discover it in marriage, but we also know that God's love is for all of us, and we can't wait for it!

Thankfully, I think this book has another purpose too. I believe it shows the love Jesus has for his bride, the church – us! This love can redefine us. We should know that we are loved and valued by God, empowered by him, capable of reflecting this love in our lives and other relationships too. Maybe have another read with that in mind, let God tell you himself.

What am I going to do differently as a result?

In any difficult dealings this week, remember how extravagantly God loves the other person. I think God wants me to enjoy loving as well as being loved, and I want to do this better!

Who am I going to share this with?

My wife and others we follow Jesus with.