

This Message Straight From Christ's Heart Can Heal Your Soul Wounds

I love speaking in women's prisons. There is a deep hunger there I seldom see outside the prison walls. I leave tingling in amazement, thinking: *O God, you are still making the blind to see.* It happened again in a Wisconsin prison with something only God could have orchestrated.

I'd been sensing that I should teach these new believers from the Song of Songs (also called Song of Solomon). But as I made the long drive, doubts clustered like storm clouds:

What am I thinking, presenting such a challenging book to babes in Christ?

They'll go back to their cells, pour over this book and think: "What in the world? What could this intimate love story have to do with Jesus and me?"

I went through security and walked down the cement hall to the chapel. When the women caught sight of me through the plexiglass window, they began jumping and clapping—cheering as I entered the room. How I wished we were allowed to hug! There's no bond like the bond of Christ —stretching across age, ethnicity and social class. Their enthusiasm melted my doubt, and I plunged ahead with my plan.

The Best Song

I asked them to open their Bibles to a book at the heart of their Bibles, a book they might never have read: *The Song of Songs*.

It's called the "Song of Songs," because like "Lord of lords," or King of kings," it means the very best. And what is the

best song? It's always the gospel, the love song of Jesus to His bride. And we, as believers, are His "bride." He sees us both as individuals, but also as a body. And oh, how He loves you and me!

Love-starved, they were listening intently. So many were victims of abuse and neglect.

The Song is a Cinderella story of a great king who falls in love with a peasant woman. It is an earthly love story, but it is intended to shed light on a much deeper mystery, the love story of Jesus coming to earth to woo, win and eventually wed His bride. When the king first meets this woman, she is so aware of her unworthiness. She's been working all day in the vineyard, and she asks him not to gaze at her because she feels dark, not meaning anything about her ethnicity, but about feeling sunburnt, sticky, sweaty—anything but beautiful or worthy of a king's attention.

They nodded. I didn't have to explain to them what it felt like to feel unworthy.

She says, "Do not gaze at me," (Song 1:6), but he can't stop. He tells her how beautiful she is to him, calling her, "O fairest among women." (Song 1:8)

Julia, a slim blonde seated near me, gasped and began to tremble visibly. I didn't want to embarrass her by drawing attention to her, so I kept teaching.

You can see the gospel here—for she feels dark, but he tells her, no, she is beautiful—as pure as a lily. A theme throughout the Song is her beauty—he says: "You are altogether fair, my love; there is no flaw in you" (Song 4:7).

Now Julia was sobbing. A woman passed her a roll of toilet paper, a staple in prison Bible studies. I paused and said, "Julia, do you want to share what's going on?"

She nodded vigorously. We waited while she composed herself. Finally, she said:

"All of my life, I wanted someone to tell me they loved me—that I was beautiful. It didn't happen in childhood, but when I got older, I determined to make men say those words to me. I'd do whatever they wanted—just to hear it. (Tears) That's how I wound up in here.

"The day before I was to be incarcerated, I looked in the mirror and screamed: "I hate you, I hate you, I hate you!"

I saw women nodding. How they identified! Julia continued.

"But in here, Jesus found me. Just this morning I told Him, 'Jesus—you are so beautiful.' And then, I thought He said, "Julia—you are beautiful." I wondered if I'd imagined it. I pleaded: "Say it again!" But there was only silence. Then tonight, you come in here, open your Bible, and—He said it again!

We sat in silence, sensing this holy moment. Finally, I said, "Julia, you've just been kissed by the King." I explained how the Song opens with her pleading to be kissed—and how, according to rabbinic tradition, "a kiss from the King" is a living Word—like when a verse leaps out at you, giving you exactly what you need, or when circumstances so align that You know God did it. I said, "In fact, we've just all been kissed!"

They nodded. God had met us all.

How badly women in prison need this message of His love—but it isn't just women in prison. We all tend to look at our hearts, our failures and doubt that God could love us. We keep losing our grasp on the gospel.

Up until the early 1800's, the Song of Songs was the most preached on book in the Old Testament, for nothing, pastors

thought, was more important in overcoming temptation and trials than understanding the depth and breadth of Christ's love. Today, you seldom hear it preached on, but if you do, it is almost always primarily on the earthly picture of marriage, with a brief addendum at the end to singles, to remember that Jesus is their Bridegroom. Yet there is a fresh wind blowing that sees *both* pictures, earthly and spiritual, as essential. When both pictures are seen, they illumine one another. Marriage and the marriage bed is seen as beautiful and sacred, but the mysterious relationship of husband and wife, as Ephesians 5 tells us, is intended to illumine a more important and lasting mystery, the relationship between Christ and true believers. How badly we need to recover this lost book, to restore our confidence in the depth of His love, and to respond to His call:

Rise up, my love, my beautiful one, and come away. O my dove, in the clefts of the rock, in the secret places of the cliffs, let me see your face, let me hear your voice; for your voice is sweet, and your face is lovely (Song 2:13b-14).

*Reprinted with permission from Sara Hagerty's blog. As a young woman **Dee Brestin** became known when her book The Friendships of Women was released and went on to sell over a million copies. Other bestsellers include Falling in Love with Jesus and A Woman of ... series. Dee publishes a free weekly Bible study on her blog ([http://www.deebrestin.com](#)) that has thousands of readers from around the world. She has a prison ministry and a video curriculum for women behind bars. She is a graduate of Northwestern University and has studied at Covenant Seminary. She is the mother of five and grandmother of 13. She lost her husband to cancer in his fifties, but is so grateful for the marriage they had. She believes passionately in the power of gospel-centered teaching. She has seen the power of the gospel to set women free—not just from the wrath of God, but from debilitating sins. He Calls You Beautiful (Hearing the Voice of Jesus in the Song of Songs) was just released. See the*

trailer here: Movie trailer for He Calls You Beautiful