

Reading Schedule for July 16-22, 2018

We will read from the Song of Solomon on affirming the God-given gift of love and marriage. These words of warm affection help nurture a marital relationship and couples preparing for marriage. Also notice the protective nature of love and the undivided focus of love in the context of a male and female commitment to each other. We need not skip this precious Book of affection.

July 16 - Song of Songs 3: “The watchmen found me as they made their rounds in the city. ‘Have you seen the one my heart loves?’” (v.3) I lean on the insights of commentaries, and scholars agree that the young woman is recalling a dream that caused her to become so concerned about her lovers whereabouts that she rose in the middle of the night to search for him. When you love someone, you will do all you can to ensure the safety of that person, and care for his or her needs, even at a cost to your personal comfort. I wanted you to notice the sacrificial nature of love that is demonstrated in the young woman’s deep concern for her lover. How do you respond to this chapter?

July 17 - Song of Songs 4: “How beautiful you are, my darling! Oh, how beautiful! Your eyes behind your veil are doves. Your hair is like a flock of goats descending from the hills of Gilead.” (v.1) Obviously this is quite an intimate exchange as the lover shares his affirmation for the one he loves. Communicating love and expressing admiration in both words and action can enhance any marriage. These word pictures are a great example for us, especially for men to be open and intimate with his wife. Take note of verse 12, which is affirming the woman’s virginity as they prepare for married life. It has always been God’s plan for people to wait to express their deepest connection of physical and sexual intimacy as they are married. Solomon and his bride affirm that fact. How do you respond to this chapter?

July 18 - Song of Songs 5: “My beloved is radiant and ruddy, outstanding among ten thousand.” (v.10) It is equally as important for the woman to express words of affirmation and affection to her man. This is a great way to honor the man of your life, even as the woman calls Solomon her friend. Companionship for a man is a very important aspect of a close relationship. Marriage at its foundation is about deep friendship. It involves listening, sharing and showing understanding for the other’s likes and dislikes. Friendship takes time, but it makes a love relationship much deeper and more satisfying. Words of affection enhance the marriage relationship. How do you respond to this chapter?

July 19 - Song of Songs 6: “I am my beloved’s and my beloved is mine; he browses among the lilies.” (v.3) Did you notice the word “mine”? Essentially the young woman is affirming the fact that they belong to each other. The oneness of marriage is affirmed as the Apostle Paul says, our bodies are not our own in marriage. We share openly and affectionately in the context of marriage like no other relationship does. The exclusivity of marriage is a protection for the deepest intimacy of marriage. Marriage is this union of mind, heart and body that is meant to be a gift from God and cultivated in a tender way, as we read in this book. You may be reading this and wonder about the purpose of this book in your life. You do have a union with God that is meant to be intimate and full of affection. You express your love and adoration for God the Father; and you

develop a close and real relationship with Jesus your Savior. May these words of love also enhance your spiritual connection to God. What stands out to you?

July 20 - Song of Songs 7: “Come, my beloved, let us go to the countryside, let us spend the night in the villages.” (v.11) This chapter makes me blush. The marriage relationship is developing as there is a free exchange between the husband and wife. In this verse the bride takes the initiative in lovemaking. The security of true love gives both marriage partners the freedom to initiate acts of love. I am going to be honest with you about an interesting “TED Talks” that was entitled, “The Sexless Marriage.” Statistically, many marriages lack sexual intimacy. Close to half of marriages do not engage in the kind of intimacy we read about in this book. This was not God’s plan. Husband and wife were meant to exchange love and pleasure with each other and for each other. May these readings, as a married person, stir up your passion for your mate. How do you respond to this very descriptive chapter on love in marriage?

July 21 - Song of Songs 8: “Place me like a seal over your heart, like a seal on your arm; for love is as strong as death, its jealousy unyielding as the grave. It burns like blazing fire, like a mighty flame.” (v.6) This verse stands alone in many ways because it talks about the power of love. Obviously we have been focusing on a relational love that is very nurturing and endearing. But these words sound very much like 1 Corinthians 13, when we learn about a love that never fails. In verse 7 it says, “Many waters cannot quench love.” Just think of the phrase, “Love is as strong as death.” This is suggesting that love is priceless. It is given as a gift from God to share with others. The Bible tells us that love covers a multitude of sins. We learn about a powerful love that the Bible defines as Agape. This unconditional kind of love is not just based on affection, but is lived out in commitment. Love is meant to be shared and enjoyed, but the bottom line of love is a persevering love that never gives up. How have you benefited from our reading in the Song of Solomon?

July 22 - 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10: “We remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.” (v.3) I always take notice when a verse mentions faith, love and hope, as these three lasting virtues have the power to shape our lives now and forever. This is a good introduction to Paul’s affirmation of the believers in Thessalonica. I chose for us to read these two letters to the Thessalonians because they are pointing to the coming of the Lord. There is interesting instruction and clear teaching on what to expect as we anticipate Christ’s return. Immediately the believers in Thessalonica had experienced persecution. But they remained strong. Paul affirms them and also tells them it won’t be long and we can expect Christ’s deliverance. The message we will read is that we must remain faithful, as well as live in the expectation that Christ will return at any time. As usual, the Apostle Paul shares affirmation and affection with these believers because he is proud of them. They are a product of his ministry. As new Christians they were showing a great deal of courage and strength through the Holy Spirit. What aspect of Paul’s greeting catches your attention?

PRAYER: Pray for our ministry at Northgate Park, as well as our Food Bank, as these are meant to bless our neighborhood.