



THE SONG OF SONGS | A THEOLOGY OF IDENTITY (18)

January 25, 2026

Song of Songs 4:1-7, 5:10-16

PURPOSE

To discover and experience Jesus Christ in our midst
To cultivate mutually encouraging relationships
To participate in God's mission to the world

GETTING TO KNOW EACH OTHER

Discussion Question

- What is your favorite season of the year? Elaborate on your answer.

WORSHIP 10 MIN

PLEASE OPEN IN PRAYER

RESPONSIVE PRAYER — Isaiah 43

But now thus says the LORD,

he who created you, O Jacob,

He who formed you, O Israel:

"Fear not, for I have redeemed you;

I have called you by name, you are mine.

When you pass through the waters, I will be with you;

And through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you;

When you walk through fire you shall not be burned,

And the flame shall not consume you.

For I am the LORD your God,

The Holy One of Israel, your Savior.

You are precious in my eyes,

And honored, and I love you."

SCRIPTURE READING

Song of Songs 4:1-7, 5:10-16

*4¹Behold, you are beautiful, my love,
behold, you are beautiful!*

*Your eyes are doves
behind your veil.*

*Your hair is like a flock of goats
leaping down the slopes of Gilead.*

*²Your teeth are like a flock of shorn ewes
that have come up from the washing,
all of which bear twins,
and not one among them has lost its young.*

*³Your lips are like a scarlet thread,
and your mouth is lovely.
Your cheeks are like halves of a pomegranate
behind your veil.*

⁴*Your neck is like the tower of David,
built in rows of stone;
on it hang a thousand shields,
all of them shields of warriors.*

⁵*Your two breasts are like two fawns,
twins of a gazelle,
that graze among the lilies.*

⁶*Until the day breathes
and the shadows flee,
I will go away to the mountain of myrrh
and the hill of frankincense.*

⁷*You are altogether beautiful, my love;
there is no flaw in you.*

⁵ ¹⁰*My beloved is radiant and ruddy,
distinguished among ten thousand.*

¹¹*His head is the finest gold;
his locks are wavy,
black as a raven.*

¹²*His eyes are like doves
beside streams of water,
bathed in milk,
sitting beside a full pool.*

¹³*His cheeks are like beds of spices,
mounds of sweet-smelling herbs.*

*His lips are lilies,
dripping liquid myrrh.*

¹⁴*His arms are rods of gold,
set with jewels.*

*His body is polished ivory,
bedecked with sapphires.*

¹⁵*His legs are alabaster columns,
set on bases of gold.*

*His appearance is like Lebanon,
choice as the cedars.*

¹⁶*His mouth is most sweet,
and he is altogether desirable.*

*This is my beloved and this is my friend,
O daughters of Jerusalem.*

BIBLE STUDY **Summary** **40 MIN**

Continuing our sermon series in Song of Songs, this week's passage provides a biblical lens for a theology of identity. In Song of Songs 4:1-7 and 5:10-17, identity is presented as a means of recognition — the joyful acknowledgment of another as beautiful and loved, created with purpose, in contrast to the more commonly accepted functional reality of identity as a “self-defining” force in modern times. The lovers carefully and lovingly describe one another's bodies: In 4:1-7 the man praises the woman from eyes to breasts, framing his words with delight (“how beautiful you are” in verse 1 and “altogether beautiful” in verse 7), while in 5:10-17 the woman responds by describing the man from head to legs, culminating in the sweetness of his mouth. These descriptions are not exhaustive portraits nor aesthetic treatises. They could not necessarily help us pick out the couple in a crowd, but they are personal testimonies shaped by

affection. The imagery may sound foreign to modern ears, evidence that standards of beauty are always shifting. But more importantly, these metaphors are expressions of delight in the other as already given and already good. Desire, rightly ordered, does not construct identity or impose meaning but instead responds with wonder to what God has made. In this way, the Song assumes a creational vision of the human person, where identity is bestowed and inherent rather than invented; affirmed rather than engineered (Genesis 1:27, 31).

Set against this vision, the Song subtly but decisively challenges the modern Western account of identity that assumes that the self must be discovered and constructed through the expression of inner desires. As philosopher Charles Taylor has observed, contemporary culture tends to locate authenticity in the outward performance of what one feels inwardly, treating desire as the most reliable guide to who we truly are. Yet desire is neither stable nor self-interpreting. It shifts, competes, and often pulls the self in opposing directions. When identity is grounded in desire alone, the result is not freedom but fragmentation. The Song offers a different anthropology. Here, desire does not create identity but responds to it. The lovers know who they are, not because they have asserted themselves, but because they are known, received, and affirmed by another within a creational order established by God (Genesis 2:18-25; cf. Westminster Confession of Faith [WCF] 4.2).

Sin, then, is not the presence of desire but its misdirection. It is when desire is given the freedom to become the architect of identity rather than a servant of God's design. From the Fall onward, human beings are tempted to define themselves apart from God's Word and order, constructing meaning and worth according to inward impulse rather than divine vocation and purpose (Genesis 3:5-6; Jeremiah 17:9; Romans 1:25; WCF 6.2). The Song resists this distortion by portraying desire as responsive, patient, and relational. The lovers do not seize identity for themselves; rather they receive one another within the boundaries of love that honors timing, mutuality, and givenness. True identity flourishes precisely because desire is *not* in the driver's seat. It is shaped by something prior to and greater than itself.

Read through this lens, the Song's vision of identity tracks nicely with the biblical witness of humans as made in God's image. Nineteenth-century Dutch theologian Herman Bavinck put it nicely, explaining that human identity is not a static inner essence to be discovered nor a private project to be constructed, but it is a dynamic, relational calling that encompasses the whole person, body and soul, and the whole human race. No individual — not even Adam — fully reflects God's infinite perfections. Identity is corporate, unfolding across humanity as a single organism marked by unity in diversity. This means that identity is inherently relational: We become who we are in communion rather than in isolation, most visibly in the two-in-one-ness of man and woman, the characters of the Song, which itself reflects the inter-relational life of God (Genesis 1:26-28; 2:24). Sin distorts this calling by turning identity inward, severing it from God's purposes and redirecting it toward self-definition and control. Grace, however, does not replace this created identity but rather restores it. In Christ, the perfect image of God (Colossians 1:15), human identity is healed and reoriented so that it may once again serve love, communion, and vocation. The Song's celebration of delight in the beloved anticipates the gospel reality that we do not come to know ourselves by asserting who we wish to be, but instead by receiving who we are as those loved, named, and restored by God in Christ (Romans 8:29; Ephesians 1:4-5; cf. WCF 8.1).

1. Looking at the Bible

- Share with the group some key phrases or ideas that stood out to you from the passage.

2. Looking at Jesus

At Central we believe that all of Scripture points to Jesus. In other words, Jesus is the theological center of the Bible. Every passage not only points to Jesus, but the grand narrative of the Bible also finds its fulfillment in the person and work of Jesus.

- Colossians 1:15 states that Jesus “is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.” And in our passage, we see identity and worth being affirmed through loving recognition instead of self-definition. How do these two things help us to understand what it means for Jesus to be the perfect image of God?

3. Looking at our Hearts

- Westminster Confession of Faith [WCF] 4.2 describes humanity as created in righteousness and holiness, oriented toward God’s design and purposes. How might we be tempted to see in our own lives the tendency to replace received identity with self-made identity?

4. Looking at our World

- Our culture tends to promote a search for identity, “finding oneself,” through various outlets or by outwardly expressing every inner desire. How might the biblical understanding of humans as created in God’s image challenge this approach?
- How might the gospel offer a better hope by proclaiming that true identity must be restored (instead of formed) through union with Christ?

PRAYER 15 MIN

Pray for each other: Share any prayer requests you have.

Pray that God would give each member of our covenant community a deep sense of restored identity in Christ. Pray that this sense of identity would lead to deep personal transformation.

Pray also for the homeless and less fortunate as we experience a bitter cold spell this week.