

## THE MARRIAGE PROJECT

### "WHAT'S THE MATTER WITH MARRIAGE?"

#### SONG OF SONGS 1:1-11

### This Week's Core Competency

**Love** – I unconditionally and sacrificially love and forgive others. 1 John 4:10-12, *This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another: No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.*

#### Introduction to Solomon's Song of Songs

When the Israelites took their first bite of manna in the wilderness, they asked "What is it?" It didn't taste like anything they had ever tasted before. And from that day forward that's what they called it, "manna," roughly translated "What is it?" (Ex 16:15, 31). Each morning they went out and gathered enough "What is it?" for the day. We might have called it "Whatever it is" and told each other to go out and pick up a day's worth of "Whatever it is." Reading the Song of Solomon for the first time is like eating manna for the first time. It prompts the question, "What is it?" It doesn't read like anything most people have ever read before. It's not law; it contains no rules and regulations. It's not history; there's no timeline. It's not a psalm; there's no worship. It's not a story; there's no narrative. It's not like any other book in the Bible for sure. So "What is it?"

The opening line of the book, "Solomon's Song of Songs" (lit., "the song of songs [of, to, by, or concerning] Solomon") helps answer that question. The expression "song of songs" is a grammatical construction in Hebrew that often indicates a superlative. For example, "vanity of vanities" in Ecclesiastes 1:2 (NASB) means "utter vanity." Likewise, in Exodus 26:33 the veil of the tabernacle served as a partition between the "holy place" and the "holy of holies," i.e., "the most holy place." This explains why the NET Bible translates verse 1,

"Solomon's most excellent love song." It's how the phrase is commonly understood. But wait; one author writes, "In this context, however, the expression may also point to the *composite* nature of the book" (Tremper Longman III, *Song of Songs*, NICOT, 87, 88 italics added). In other words, the phrase may point to the fact that the book is really "a collection of individual love songs [a song comprised of songs] rather than a single multistanza poem" (the NET Bible, **tn** 3, SS 1:1). Reading the book actually suggests as much. And while the Hebrew word translated "song" can refer to a musical song that was sung or a poetic composition that was simply read, several factors (e.g., its length, the absence of musical notations and instrumental instructions, the history of Jewish interpretation, etc.) make the latter more likely. Therefore, it appears reasonable to conclude that The Song of Solomon is literally a single poem comprised of many poems largely in the form of soliloquies typically delivered one after the other by the "beloved" and her "lover." And while the king may have composed the Song in his youth, as Jewish tradition suggests (cf., 1Ki 4:29-34), "It is also conceivable, on analogy with Proverbs, that Solomon, though not the author of the book as a whole, was the originator of some of the poems within the collection" (88; see "II. Authorship," 4-7).

The literary critic, Leland Ryken, agrees. He writes: "There really can be no doubt that the Song of Solomon is a collection of love poems. When we read in the second verse of the book, 'O that you would kiss me with the kisses of your mouth!' it is obvious that the main characters in the book are rapturously in love and that the main action of the book is romantic love between a man and a woman. As in other love poetry, the main subject matter is the emotions of love.

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The book covers a whole range of romantic emotions: the rapture of falling in love, impatience for the love to progress to marriage, longing to be with the beloved, the frustration of separation between lovers, and above all the voice of romantic passion satisfied (as in the matchless, 'My beloved is mine and I am his' [2:16]). To say that the content of the poem is human passion is to say that this is a collection of love lyrics, not a story or a drama" (*Words of Delight*, 271-72).

As far as the point of the book is concerned, it's been read in two very different ways historically. Prior to the reformation, it was generally read allegorically. Read this way, its references to human love and intimacy refer to something else-either the relationship of God to Israel or of Christ to the church. "Origen, for example wrote that the beloved's reference to her being dark (Song 1:5-6) means the church is ugly with sin, but that her loveliness (1:5) refers to spiritual beauty after conversion. Others said the cooing of the doves (2:12) speaks of the preaching of the apostles, and some have suggested that 5:1 refers to the Lord's Supper. These examples show that the allegorical approach is subjective with no way to verify that any of the interpretations are correct" (Jack S. Deere, "Song of Songs," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*, 1009). Thus explaining in large part its fall from grace. After the reformation, it was read literally with greater frequency, and by the nineteenth century supporters of an allegorical reading were hard to find. Read this way, it refers first and foremost to love and sexual intimacy between human beings (see "VII. History of Interpretation," 20-47). However, it would be wrong to think of the Song as a dating guide or a sex manual. It's not a "how-to book," but rather poetry intent on evoking a mood more than mandating the reader to engage in specific types of behavior.

And yet, a closer look reveals that the two different readings may not be mutually exclusive (see Iain Provan, *The NIV Application Commentary: Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, 248-55). On the one hand, "the purpose of the book is to extol human love and marriage . . . Since the world views sex so sordidly and perverts and exploits it so persistently and since so many marriages are crumbling because of lack of love, commitment, and devotion, it is advantageous to have a book in the Bible that gives God's endorsement of marital love as wholesome and pure" (1009, 10). On the other, in both the Old Testament and the New, relationship with God is described in terms of the metaphor of marriage, and idolatry is deemed analogous to marital unfaithfulness. Therefore, the Song teaches us not only about the emotional intensity, intimacy, and exclusivity of our relationship to our spouse but also to our God.

## day 1 ENCOUNTER – read God's word to put yourself in touch with him.

### Song of Songs 1:1-11

1 Solomon's Song of Songs.

#### **Beloved**

2 Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth-  
for your love is more delightful than wine.

3 Pleasing is the fragrance of your perfumes;  
your name is like perfume poured out.

No wonder the maidens love you!

4 Take me away with you-let us hurry!

Let the king bring me into his chambers.

#### **Friends**

We rejoice and delight in you;  
we will praise your love more than wine.

#### **Beloved**

How right they are to adore you!

5 Dark am I, yet lovely,

O daughters of Jerusalem,  
dark like the tents of Kedar,  
like the tent curtains of Solomon.

6 Do not stare at me because I am dark,  
because I am darkened by the sun.

My mother's sons were angry with me  
and made me take care of the vineyards;  
my own vineyard I have neglected.

7 Tell me, you whom I love, where you graze your flock  
and where you rest your sheep at midday.

Why should I be like a veiled woman  
beside the flocks of your friends?

#### **Friends**

8 If you do not know, most beautiful of women,  
follow the tracks of the sheep  
and graze your young goats  
by the tents of the shepherds.

#### **Lover**

9 I liken you, my darling, to a mare  
harnessed to one of the chariots of Pharaoh.

10 Your cheeks are beautiful with earrings,  
your neck with strings of jewels.

11 We will make you earrings of gold,  
studded with silver.

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## **EXAMINE** – what the passage says before you decide what it means.

- \* Bracket "of songs" in v. 1.
- \* Bracket "of his mouth" in v. 2.
- \* Circle "your name" in v. 3.
- \* Box "like" indicating *comparison* throughout.
- \* Circle "chambers" in v. 4.
- \* Underline "we" in v. 4.
- \* Bracket "O daughters of Jerusalem" in v. 5.
- \* Circle "my own vineyard" in v. 6.
- \* Circle "a veiled woman" in v. 7.
- \* Underline "mare" in v. 9.
- \* Underline "we" in v. 11.

## day **2**

## **EXPLORE** – the answer to these questions to better understand what the passage means.

Consult the explanation of the message and the notes to follow if you need help.

1. The feelings each expresses for the other in verses 1-11 typify a stage in the couple's relationship. Describe it.
  2. Verses 2-4 are *emotional* and *imagistic*. Describe the emotion and the images used to express it.
  3. Explain the *comparison* (expressed in a simile, see "like") in verse 3.
  4. Identify the desire of all lovers portrayed in verse 4.
  5. Describe how the woman feels about her appearance.
  6. "Vineyards" (pl.) is used *literally* but "vineyard" (sing.) is used *metaphorically* in verse 6. Explain.
  7. Explain the *comparison* in verse 7.
  8. Put the point of the friends' advice to the woman in your own words.
  9. The man compares his "darling" to a mare in verse 9; verse 10 sheds light on the point of that *comparison*. How so?
  10. **Discussion:** Talk about what you think these poems are talking about.
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## day 3

## EXAMINE – an explanation of its message to clarify your understanding of the passage.

Reading the Song of Solomon or Song of Songs isn't easy; one writer ventures to say it "is perhaps the most difficult and mysterious book in the entire Bible" (Jack S. Deere, "Song of Songs," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*, 1009). So it comes as no surprise that interpreters over the centuries have been unable to agree on how to read the book—largely because they can't agree on what they're reading. Among scholars in general, the Song has been interpreted as: (a) an allegory, (b) an extended type, (c) a drama involving either two or three main characters, (d) a collection of Syrian wedding songs in which the groom played the role of a king and the bride played the role of a queen, (e) a collection of pagan fertility cult liturgies, and (f) an anthology of disconnected songs extolling human love. Many evangelical scholars now interpret it as a lyric poem, likely comprised of many poems, but with a unity evident in its recurrent refrains, common characters, and the repetition of various themes and metaphors (see Introduction).

Song of Songs 1:2-11 contains three poems, two in the form of soliloquies delivered by a woman (vv. 2-4; 5-7), indicated in the margin by the caption "Beloved," and one delivered by a man (vv. 9-11), indicated by the caption "Lover." In the first poem, the woman expresses love's longing. According to one commentator, "She is by far the most dominant presence in the Song . . . The woman not only speaks more often but also initiates the relationship and pursues it" (Longman, 15). Another writes, "This is really her book" (G. Lloyd Carr, *Song of Solomon*, TOTC, 142). She's a young woman in love who longs for the kisses of her love's mouth. In other words, she yearns for him to kiss her repeatedly and passionately for the very thought of his caresses delights her even more than wine. Fine wine, a rich and sensuous liquid, intoxicates and leaves one lightheaded, but its effects pale in comparison to thoughts of his intoxicating touch. After praising his *taste*, she celebrates his *scent*. His cologne smells great, but it doesn't do him justice. His reputation goes before him, and it, too, passes the smell test. Moreover, all the young women swoon over him, thereby confirming her assessment. The woman's adoring thoughts culminate in the wish of all young lovers: She wishes he would come to take her away so they

might be alone, so that they might be together forever. Friends give their blessing to the relationship.

In the second poem, the woman expresses love's doubts. She's dark-skinned yet beautiful, but she's still self-conscious and makes it clear that she finds her scorched complexion unattractive. She compares her sun-baked skin to "tents of Kedar," which were made of black goats' hair (1013), and becomes defensive when the "daughters of Jerusalem" stare at her. She wants them to know that her swarthy color isn't her fault; it's her brothers' fault. They forced her outside to prune their vines in the hot sun. Tending their "vineyards" made it impossible for her to tend her own "vineyard," that is, her own physical beauty. The woman overcomes her self-consciousness when she seeks to rendezvous with the one she loves. Uncertain as to where he might be found, she hesitates. If only she knew where he was grazing his flock, she wouldn't have to wander about mysteriously beside the flocks of his friends. But she doesn't hesitate for long. The maidens help resolve her uncertainty by telling her to follow the tracks of the sheep so she can graze her young goats by the tents of the shepherds. No doubt she'll spot him in the fields. The reader is left to believe that inspired by love, she does this despite any uncertainty she might have regarding her reception.

In the third poem, the man speaks for the first time to express love requited. We know she loves him, but does he love her? How will he respond should she find him? Will he turn away at the very sight of her or take her in his arms in a loving embrace? His first words appear to send a mixed message. He calls her "my darling," but then he likens her to a mare—not just any horse, however, one of Pharaoh's chariot horses. The image may sound unromantic, but verse 10 helps clarify the point of his comparison. The woman is beautifully adorned like pharaoh's mares. One commentator observes, "To a modern reader, it is somewhat bewildering that the man would compare his beloved to a horse. The point is not that she looks like a horse. Instead she is likened to a horse among pharaoh's chariots in that she, like the horse, is magnificent to look upon. The only point of actual visual similarity is that both she and the mare attached to pharaoh's chariot are adorned in splendid ornamentation. Egyptian artwork depicts the horses

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of the royal chariots with headdresses and finery" (Duane Garrett and Paul R. House, *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 23B, *Song of Songs, Lamentations*, 144). The woman feels self-conscious about her appearance, but then her lover, in true lover fashion, praises her physical beauty, promising her jewelry, so that her detractors have to agree.

These three poems, typical of others in the Song, celebrate the love between a man and a woman, affirming intimacy, sensuousness, and sexuality. They explore the thrill and power of the pure emotion and affirm the joys of physical touch, the exhilaration of exotic scents, the sweet sound of a cherished voice, and the taste of a lover's kiss.

### *The Message of the Passage*

*Love between a man and a woman that captivates the heart, enralls the mind, and overwhelms the senses is a wondrous blessing to be celebrated.*

day **4** **EMBRACE** – how God spoke to you through his word.

Our desire is to not be merely hearers of the word, but doers of the word as James teaches in James 1:22. Reflect on the three "living questions" below to apply what you have learned this week.

• **Journal your answers to the following *living* questions:**

–How is God making himself known to you?

–How does God want to change you?

–How is God calling you to change your world?

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# notes **N** STUDY – the commentaries to answer the questions.

v. 1 *of songs* "Song of songs" indicates either the superlative (cf., "most holy," lit., "holy of holies" in Ex 29:37), i.e., the best song, or a single poem composed of many poems, literally a "song of songs." Perhaps both.

*Stanza Headings* "Lover" = Solomon; "Beloved" = a Shulamite girl; cf., "He" and "She" respectively in NIV 2011; Friends, i.e., "The 'daughters of Jerusalem' who appear in the work from time to time are like the chorus in a Greek drama—townspeople who provide a social setting for what happens" (Ryken, 280).

v. 2 *of his mouth* Refers to a passionate rather than a polite display of affection. "Oh, how I wish you would kiss me passionately!" (the NET Bible); "Kiss me and kiss me again" (NLT).

v. 2 *love* Lit., "your loves." Not just the abstract quality but given the context, the physical expressions of love also, that is "your caresses" (Garrett and House, 128).

v. 2 *more delightful* "The bouquet of the wine as well as its taste creates an enticing metaphor for the physical aspects of love, especially the kiss. Drinking wine intoxicates, and kissing the woman arouses the man, making him lightheaded. Indeed, she insists not only that the man's love is like wine, but that it is better than wine" (Longman, 91).

v. 3 *perfumes* Lit., "the scent of your oils." "The fragrance of your colognes is delightful" (the NET Bible); "How fragrant your cologne" (NLT).

v. 3 *your name* "A person's name represented his character or reputation (cf. 2 Sam. 7:9). So comparing his name to perfume meant that his character was pleasing and attractive to the beloved. For this reason, she said, many were attracted to him" (Deere, 1011-12). "The very mention of his name is like an aromatic delight" (Garrett, 129).

v. 4 *Let . . . chambers* Rather than "has brought me into his chambers" in other versions (the NET Bible, **tn** 21, SS 1:4). The Heb term translated "chambers" frequently refers to a bedroom and so may express the beloved's desire to be with her love. "The appeal to run away together is a frequent motif of the Song and it expresses a common desire of young lovers: that they escape the constraints that hold them back and that they be free to explore their love together" (130). "The bedroom is obviously a private place where the couple can be alone" (Longman, 93).

v. 4 *we* Cf., "maidens" (v. 3). The beloved's "friends" (see NIV marg.), elsewhere referred to as 'the daughters of Jerusalem' (v. 5; 3:10; 5:8, 16) and 'daughters of Zion' (3:11), spoke in 1:4b. "Many suggestions have been given concerning the identity of the 'daughters of Jerusalem,' such as female wedding guests, ladies of the royal court, concubines in the royal harem. Most likely they refer to the female inhabitants of Jerusalem" (Deere, 1012). In short, "maidens," "daughters of Jerusalem," and "daughters of Zion" refer to the same young women (Longman, 94).

v. 4 *you* "You" (masc. sing) refers to "the king" (v. 3). The "maidens" concur with the beloved in her assessment of the king in v. 4a. "The poem ends [v. 4b] with the woman again affirming that other women are right to love the man. She is not the only one; she is not deluded. He is indeed a worthy recipient of her adoration. The chorus often serves as a mirror of the woman's emotions, a sounding board as it were throughout the book" (94).

v. 5 *dark* "The beloved's suntanned appearance (**dark am I**) revealed that she worked in the fields. This made her feel insecure (**do not stare at me**) among the city dwellers and in particular the women of Jerusalem . . . Her explanation for her dark appearance was almost an apology" (Deere, 1013). "Her reaction invites us to suggest that the text assumes a culture where a deep, dark tan or burn is not attractive" (Longman, 96).

v. 6 *her own vineyard* The hard work imposed on her by her brothers, caused her to neglect her own body, especially her complexion.

v. 7 *veiled woman* This enigmatic expression may refer figuratively to a prostitute (NLT) or a woman in mourning (more likely)—in this case because she is unable to find her love. Or perhaps neither as one writer suggests. "The veil in the present verse just adds to the furtiveness of the scene. She is stealing out to be with her beloved. The woman's veiling also adds to her mystique, a quality that will be exploited later in the Song (e.g., 4:3)" (101).

v. 9 *mare* Perhaps, given the fact that chariot horses were normally stallions, the man was saying "that she drives all the men crazy with her attractiveness, with the implication that she drives him to distraction as well" (Longman, 103).

v. 11 *we* The pronoun likely refers to the "maidens" (cf., v. 4) who concur with the man's assessment of his beloved's beauty and express a desire to add to it by adding to her jewelry.

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## Family Talk

Encouragement from one parent's heart to another

Parents, PantegoKids will not be aligning with the adult series, *The Marriage Project*. Instead, we will be studying different aspects of godly friendships in the Bible. In our five-week series, *Better Together*, kids will learn: Why they should have good friends; How to be a good friend; How to resolve conflict in friendships; and Who our best friend is! This week we will study some of the people who helped Paul in his missionary journeys. These friends worked with him to help him spread the good news of Jesus. Paul couldn't have done it alone. Neither can we! We need each other and God has created us for relationships. Who is that special friend in your life who helps you grow in your spiritual life? Make time this week to sit down and talk to your kids about your friendships. What do you like best about your friends? What do you look for in a good friend? What are some things you do to be a good friend? Tell a story about a time when a friend helped you when you really needed it. Our kids learn to navigate relationships in their lives by watching us. Are you modeling how to be a good friend for them? Friends love us, stretch us and are a lot of fun. Celebrate the gift of your friendships this week and help your kids do the same!

### What Does The Bible Say

Weekly Verse: Read Ro 16:1-16

1. Who are the people Paul is greeting in his letter to the Romans?
2. Which people did Paul say risked their lives for him?
3. Who was Epenetus (v. 5)?

### What Do You Think

All of those mentioned in Paul's greeting at the end of his letter are friends he had made throughout his travels. How do you think Paul felt about these friends? Could Paul have been as successful without the help of these friends?

### What R U Going To Do

We all need friends. Can you think of a friend who has helped you out when you needed it? Find a friend who needs help with something this week and do it! Write down what you did, how it made you feel and how your friend felt and share it with your group.

### Core Comp

Biblical Community - I spend time with other Christians to help with God's work.

### Memory Verse

1 Corinthians 13:4 - *Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud.*

### KIDPIX COUPON

I memorized my verse \_\_\_\_\_, completed *Scrolls* \_\_\_\_\_, brought Bible \_\_\_\_\_, brought a friend \_\_\_\_\_.

Series Discipleship Challenge located in KidPix Store.

Child's name \_\_\_\_\_ Grade \_\_\_\_\_ Parent's signature \_\_\_\_\_

Earn 1 token by completing the PantegoKids Bible study and another token by reciting the memory verse.  
Questions: Kids@pantego.org

# 30 CORE COMPETENCIES

## 10 CORE BELIEFS

### **Trinity** *2 Corinthians 13:14*

I believe the God of the Bible is the only true God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

### **Salvation By Grace** *Ephesians 2:8-9*

I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.

### **Authority of the Bible** *2 Timothy 3:16-17*

I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.

### **Personal God** *Psalms 121:1-2*

I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.

### **Identity in Christ** *John 1:12*

I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.

### **Church** *Ephesians 4:15-16*

I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today.

### **Humanity** *John 3:16*

I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.

### **Compassion** *Psalms 82:3-4*

I believe God calls all Christians to show compassion to those in need.

### **Eternity** *John 14:1-4*

I believe there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus Christ is returning to judge the earth and to establish His eternal kingdom.

### **Stewardship** *1 Timothy 6:17-19*

I believe that everything I am or own belongs to God.

## 10 CORE PRACTICES

### **Worship** *Psalms 95:1-7*

I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.

### **Prayer** *Psalms 66:16-20*

I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life.

### **Bible Study** *Hebrews 4:12*

I read the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.

### **Single-mindedness** *Matthew 6:33*

I focus on God and His priorities for my life.

### **Spiritual Gifts** *Romans 12:4-6*

I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.

### **Biblical Community** *Acts 2:44-47*

I fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, others' lives, and in the world.

### **Giving Away My Time** *Colossians 3:17*

I give away my time to fulfill God's purposes.

### **Giving Away My Money**

*2 Corinthians 8:7*

I give away my money to fulfill God's purposes.

### **Giving Away My Faith** *Ephesians*

*6:19-20*

I give away my faith to fulfill God's purposes.

### **Giving Away My Life** *Romans 12:1*

I give away my life to fulfill God's purposes.

## 10 CORE VIRTUES

### **Joy** *John 15:11*

I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.

### **Peace** *Philippians 4:6-7*

I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, myself, and others.

### **Faithfulness** *Proverbs 3:3-4*

I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to those relationships.

### **Self-Control** *Titus 2:11-13*

I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.

### **Humility** *Philippians 2:3, 4*

I choose to esteem others above myself.

### **Love** *1 John 4:10-12*

I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.

### **Patience** *Proverbs 14:29*

I take a long time to overheat and endure patiently under the unavoidable pressures of life.

### **Kindness/Goodness** *1 Thess. 5:15*

I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others.

### **Gentleness** *Philippians 4:5*

I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in dealing with others.

### **Hope** *Hebrews 6:19-20*

I can cope with the hardships of life and with death because of the hope I have in Jesus Christ.

## About the Authors

**Tom Bulick** (M.A. in Educational Leadership, Eastern Michigan University, Th.M. in Old Testament, and Ph.D. in Bible Exposition, Dallas Theological Seminary). For more than forty years, Tom has served as pastor, faculty member, and administrator. Tom was Vice President for Student Life and Associate Professor of Religious Studies at Trinity Western University (Vancouver, B.C.) for twelve years before accepting the position of Spiritual Formation Pastor at Pantego Bible Church. He and his wife Ruth have been married forty-eight years and have one son, Zach.

**Wendy Hollabaugh** (B.S.W. University of Texas at Arlington) is the Children's Minister at Pantego Bible Church. Wendy has over ten years of experience in Children's Ministry. She has a passion for leading families to connect with God and each other. She enjoys creating compelling environments where kids fall in love with God and His Truth. Wendy and her husband, Greg, are also involved in their own personal youth ministry as they are training their three teenagers, Hannah, Aaron and Noah.



8001 Anderson Blvd.  
Ft. Worth, TX 76120  
1-866-PANTEGO  
Fax 817-275-6403  
[www.pantego.org](http://www.pantego.org)

The mission of THE SCROLLS is to help you develop the beliefs, practices, and virtues of a follower of Jesus Christ called The 30 Core Competencies through your own active reading of the Bible. Send any questions or comments you may have about this lesson to Tom Bulick. His e-mail address is [tbulick@pantego.org](mailto:tbulick@pantego.org).