**Song of Songs 8:5-7**

**Poet**

**5** Who is this coming from the wilderness, leaning

 on her beloved?

**Bride to King**

 Beneath the apple tree I awakened you;

 there your mother was in labor with you;

 there she was in labor and gave you birth.

**6**  Put me as a seal upon your heart,

 as a seal upon your arm.

 For strong as death is love.

 Relentless as a Sheol is jealousy.

 Its flashes are flashes of fire,

 the flame of YAHWEH.

**7** Many waters cannot extinguish this love

 and rivers will not drown it.

 If a man were to give all the possessions of his house

 for love, he would be utterly despised.

**Characteristics of True Love**

1.      Here the poet sets before our eyes a picture of the couple who just experienced their second honeymoon in the countryside. Off in the distance, we can see they are strolling together. Her head is gently leaning upon his chest and his arm is around her. After depicting such a lovely scene of this couple, now the poet tells us the characteristics of love in this Song by answering his own question for us (8:5a).

 2. The wife is saying to her husband, king Solomon, “Beneath the apple tree I awakened you.” (8:5b) She uses such a phrase three times, and here she does so by using a symbolic tree, “apple tree” for the “sweetheart tree” in their particular culture. It is indeed a familiar symbol for romance in their culture. Once at a particular time, Shulamite awakened his love for her. The circumstances were favorable, the atmosphere was just right. For this couple, there is a right time, and when it comes romance begins. She knows king Solomon was born, he was favored by YAHWEH and destined to find fulfillment of his life under the tree of love and romance.

3. The wife wisely compares the pang of love when it started in her with the king’s mother’s pain of labor when she gives him birth! Like queen Bathsheba had a labor pain, so Shulamite has a love-pain, that is, her insecurity and inferiority when they first met. She had such a humble pain of unworthiness coming upon her when she fell in love with the visiting king Solomon. Later during her courtship with king Solomon, once again she experienced the pain of longing and the fear of unfulfilled love when they were apart. Even after their marriage, she experienced the pain of separation during a conflict in their marriage. Yet, Shulamite confesses here that after such pain of love, their marriage relationship was given birth like the birth after the labor pain in king Solomon’s mother.

4. Love is painful. The bitter pain of disappointment in an apathetic response, the misery of argument, and misunderstandings, all of this is a part of romantic love, part of the price tag. Yet it is often a fruitful pain for a more mature, richer, and deeper love relationship between the couple.

5. Love is possessive. Her confession, “Put me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm” (8:6a) is what true love is about. It is like someone’s precious possession that cannot be parted. His arm is a symbol of his strength and his heart is where his affection is. Shulamite is saying she like his so precious possession that he cannot separate himself from her.

“For strong as death is love. Relentless as a Sheol is jealousy. Its flashes are flashes of fire, the flame of YAHWEH.” (8:6b) Death conquers all in its path and never reverses its course. Likewise, love conquers all like a victorious conqueror and will overcome its opposition and irreversible. Like YAHWEH’s jealous concern for His people intense and eternal, king Solomon’s jealous love for her is intense and eternally irreversible.

6. Love is persevering. “Many waters cannot extinguish this love and rivers will not drown it.” (8:7a) Shulamite does not say no waters or rivers will come. But she says no waters or rivers will overcome king Solomon’s love for her! His love for her is “water-proof”, always burning under any circumstances! In the Book of Hosea, the prophet shows such a persevering love for his wayward wife. By obeying YAHWEH’s command Hosea married his wife, Gomer. But Hosea’s love for his wife has gone through tough times because she left him for her lover. Yet following YAHWEH’s command this prophet takes her back in her unfaithfulness! Hosea’s marriage resembles YAHWEH’s persevering love and mercies for wayward Israel! Likewise, king Solomon’s love for her is never changing and perseveres through all tumultuous tides in life. Indeed, love perseveres in spite of betrayal!

7. Love is priceless. “If a man were to give all the possessions of his house

for love, he would be utterly despised.” (8:7b) Shulamite once again confesses to Solomon that his love for her is just priceless, so has no price tag.

People may buy sex, can never buy love. Love is not something to quantify and to be bought. Love is just given and never bought. We are image of God, so we cannot make a person and his love something to buy or discard after use. Like our life is given as a gift from our Creator YAHWEH, Solomon’s love for Shulamite is just given to her. She is so precious and a special gift from YAHWEH, Solomon cannot dare to depersonalize her by money-value, nor degrade his love for her to something to put a price tag.

**Questions to Ponder with Prayers**

1.    What are the characteristics of a true love in the Song of Songs?

2.    In what areas of relationship we might say “we are destined for each other by God”?

3. In what specific ways do you look for a complement from your marriage partner?