

An Interview with  
**John & Anita Renfroe**  
Authors of  
*Songs in the  
Key of Solomon*



**David C. Cook:** John and Anita you've just celebrated your 25<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary, have devotions together always played a big part in your married life?

**Anita:** *We always wished that they did! We had this pervasive guilty feeling that we were somehow missing out on God's Plan For Our Marriage because we both had rich devotional times separately, but just couldn't seem to get it together as a couple. We were on church staff and ministering and counseling together – and we would pray together and we would share spiritual truths with each other sporadically, but there wasn't any sort of devotional book or resource out there that just made us want to continue with it, regularly, for very long. So I would have to say that devotions together have not been our consistent practice – which may have been the impetus for writing this. I think we were trying to create the book we wanted but couldn't find all these years.*

**John:** *As a pastor, I probably should take the 5<sup>th</sup> Amendment! But even when we were working out of the same devotional book as a couple, we would each have our own copy – this is possibly the result of two firstborns being married to each other. And no matter what we tried, it was hard to find something that was mutually engaging. We would normally try to reconnect at bedtime. Anita wanted to download from her day and us pray, I just wanted to finish talking and praying so we could make out!*

**David C. Cook:** Did you have a special time everyday that you set aside for devotions together or do you mix it up and meet at different times?

**Anita:** *As our lives are a little less structured around our kids now, we have a bit more freedom to enjoy more spontaneity in many areas of marriage (!) so that would apply to our devotional times, too. We have friends who are much more ...um...how should we say? Maybe "steady" – and they enjoy the comfort of setting aside a certain block of time that they look forward to and they actually enjoy having it set like an appointment. We just aren't that kind of couple. So mixing it up works better for us - but to each their own.*

**David C. Cook:** Most couples live in the fast lane these days. Between car pools, sports, church activities, friendships and many other day-to-day activities, couples are beginning and ending their days exhausted. How do they incorporate *Songs in the Key of Solomon* in their life and keep with it so they can reap the long term benefits?

**Anita:** *This is one of the exciting elements of this book. The devotions themselves are rather brief, but they are designed to ignite intimacy and conversation around God's Word. We strongly believe that, by making the experience of coming together around the Bible one that is satisfying for both the husband and wife that there will always be one of the partners who is anticipating the experience to keep the momentum to continue with it strong and motivated. Sometimes it might be the wife because she is jazzed about the emotional closeness she feels with her husband, sometimes it may be the husband who is, quite frankly, excited that God's Word speaks so fervently to the issues of physical intimacy – but we are counting on the fact that both will enjoy the fact that – as they move closer to each other – they will find themselves moving closer to God – together.*

**John:** *No doubt – busyness is an intimacy killer. The higher the demand, the more necessary it is that we value daily reconnection. If it isn't on the front burner, weeks turn into months and one day you wake up to find that you haven't checked in with each other in a l-o-n-g time. We've all heard people say, "I don't know what happened. We just drifted apart." No one ever says, "I definitely made a conscious decision to emotionally check out of this marriage" Drifting is easy. Making the effort to stay connected and intimate is more important the busier life gets. Our*

devotions are designed to take a minimum amount of time to engage, but our hope is that it will spark conversations that take the couple to a place where they want to stay in the moment longer than the devotion requires.

**David C. Cook:** In *Songs in the Key of Solomon*, you have uniquely set up the devotions so that couples can encounter each other physically, emotionally and spiritually every time. Does the couple need to encounter each other on all three levels every time to be successful?

**John:** One can hope, can't one? I don't know about the term "successful" – but we have given a lot of latitude in the area of what constitutes "success." If you read the scripture together, and only chose to answer two of the three discussion questions and then found yourself (to put it biblically) "enjoying the wife of your youth" I don't know a man alive on this planet who wouldn't term that "successful."

**Anita:** Well, the subtitle *is* "In the Word and In the Mood"! I'm not sure if they HAVE to encounter each other on all three levels every single time, but it sure is fun to try! We have a sense that most couples tend to compartmentalize their different types of intimacy and try to keep them separate (a la, "We're reading the Bible now, so I should shut down my physical side" or "We're making love now, so it's not spiritual") when the truth is this: intimacy is intimacy. When you get closer or further apart in any category of intimacy it will affect the others. That's why we're so hopeful that couples will start to see them as inter-related, not compartmentalized – and that is the aim of every devotional in this book – that the couple will be firing on all the pistons every time they come together.

**David C. Cook:** John, as a pastor, you've counseled a lot of couples. And you know for some couples coming together and being that honest and intimate with each other will be difficult and uncomfortable. How would you encourage them to create a safe place to begin and keep at it when they feel like it's too hard and they want to quit?

**John:** In the beginning, man and woman were naked in the garden, before God and each other and were not ashamed. That was how God planned it to be. Unfortunately, no one's address is in Eden's zip code. Part of the curse after The Fall was that we would have to work very hard to achieve anything remotely close to that kind of spiritual union. And the baggage we all bring into a relationship – shame, feelings of unworthiness, the tendency to hide ourselves rather than reveal ourselves – can really bring us to a place where it feels easier to stay at arm's length than to let someone inside. Every time you (as a couple) choose to drill down a little more in any area of intimacy and you begin to create intentional opportunities for God's Word to speak into your lives, you start to realize that every connection, every micromovement toward each other is a step closer to Eden - to get back to that sense of being open with each other before God.

**David C. Cook:** We all know men and women think and process information very differently. What is the number one reason men and women don't hang in there with the average devotional? How is *Songs in the Key of Solomon* different?

**Anita:** A lot of women will just give up trying to make it happen. So many times, the wife is really desiring to have some time around the Bible with her husband, but she genuinely gets tired of driving the train, so to speak. If her husband feels like she's nagging him to do it sometimes she will just stop asking. And I know from personal experience that, when my kids were little, we would be so exhausted by the time we got in bed that we would (literally) go to sleep while praying together. That's one reason we suggest different settings for each devotional (they're optional, but it keeps you from nodding off!) Also, we don't spend a lot of time telling you what we think the scripture is saying. We provide just a few comments to get you from the scripture into the questions designed to get YOU talking to each other, not just reading our thoughts – but really interacting and finding new connection points together.

**John:** Men respond best to action and activity, we want to spend time with our mate but it seems couples devotionals highlight the emotional presence with little concern for any physical engagement - which helps to open up a man emotionally. That is why our devotions are designed to have an interactive approach that is both vertical (scripture) and horizontal (each other).

**David C. Cook:** While researching this project you must have had a lot of fun with the different devotions laid out in *Songs in the Key of Solomon*. Can you each share your favorite devotional encounter... but...keep it G rated of course!

**John:** *Since I'm a big fan of Christmas, I would have to say I enjoyed the one about "Christmas Every Day" because it talks about your spouse being the "gift" that you get to keep unwrapping every day. I can't get Anita to wear the big red bow, but I keep asking.*

**Anita:** *Hmmmm – should we say which pages are our personal favorites?? I think the best times we have had together around the Bible have been when we're both reading the same verse and John will come up with a thought regarding that scripture that is so incredibly...well... **MALE** that I have to admit that there are such huge gender differences! And not in the negative way, but in the way that I come to value his maleness more – he's such a guy and his love of God is just as deep as mine, and the more I hear him talk about how he experiences God, the more I fall in love with him. And maybe this is avoiding the question - but the most ambiguous thing I could say is that we had to come up with 60 different settings for the devos, and many of the places we suggest that the couples go to have their devo time were **new for us!** Sequel, anyone?*

**David C. Cook:** To end this interview I wanted to ask each of you to give a word of encouragement to the couples that are looking for a great devotional and who are committed to deepening their emotional, physical and spiritual unity with each other. If you had the chance to say one thing what would it be?

**Anita:** *Well – by no means am I suggesting that our book is The End All of All Couples Devotional Books, but I can say that it's a great start. And I would love to tell couples that – although intimacy always entails risk - that it's SO worth it. The pursuit of a deeper level of intimacy will keep the marriage fresh and growing. The rewards are both rich and eternal.*

**John:** *Shared experiences are the ones that count. If you share a home, share the shower gel, share the sunsets and share the desserts, but you never really get around to sharing yourself with each other, you've really missed the whole point of marriage. That's what we want – a husband and a wife to give themselves wholeheartedly to each other – in every conceivable way.*