

The Crossings, Matt Powell  
Engage Your Marriage (Week 2)

If you can, try and imagine all of the songs throughout scripture. Maybe you have never thought about it this way, but there is a lot of music in the Bible. There is Mary's song in Luke called the *Magnificat*, and the book of Psalms is filled with worship songs that David wrote to the Creator. So there is music and songs throughout the Bible, but this book that we are going to look at today, and over the next coming weeks, is the Song of Songs—the greatest of all the songs in the Bible.

Last week we said that the Hebrew language does not use any superlatives. For example, in Isaiah, chapter six, it says, "Holy, holy, holy." Since they don't have a way to say *the holiest*, instead they say, "Holy, holy, holy," which means the holiest of all holies. So when we see the title *Song of Songs*, it means this is the *greatest* song of all the songs in this book, which was probably written by Solomon around 900 to 1,000 BC, right before the split into two kingdoms: the north and the south, Judah and Israel.

And we talked about how we are not exactly sure who these two characters are, other than one is a shepherd—the male, and one is a Shulamite woman. Now many people think the shepherd is Solomon and it very well could be. I made the observation that possibly what happened was Solomon, whom we know from the book of Ecclesiastes had 700 wives and 300 concubines, was really a frustrated guy, and we don't get the picture that he ever felt the kind of real love that we see in Song of Songs. So it is possible that one of the females he pursued found love with someone else. Solomon saw the way these two fell in love with each other, pursued each other, were infatuated with each other, thrived in the creation that God designed for marriage, and he was amazed. I am persuaded by that option, but it is perfectly fine if you disagree with me. Plenty of people smarter than me do disagree with me.

But one thing we all have to get on the same page about is the fact that we have got a shepherd and a Shulamite woman, and we have an entire book of eight chapters that gives us a picture of what marriage and biblical love are supposed to look like. Isn't that amazing? Have you ever thought about all of the marriage books out there? Ever walked through Barnes & Noble and

noticed all the self-help books, the marriage and relationship 101 books? Or if you listen to Dr. Phil or Oprah, how many times are they talking about relationships? Think of how much time is given to all of these other theories and philosophies, yet we have this entire book of the Bible that is one of the most beautifully written, yet one of the most neglected books out of all 66—neglected second only to Revelation.

So just to give you a reminder from last week, how are we going to approach this book and its language of Hebrew poetry? English poetry is hard enough to understand, but Hebrew poetry written about 3,000 years ago is a very difficult language to understand. It is an art in and of itself. Rather than looking at it from chapter one, verse one, all the way through to the end of chapter eight, we will look at it like we would songs or music. If you are familiar with music, oftentimes they contain themes and variations. I took a music history class in college, and for our test the professor would play about 30 seconds of a song, and we would have to identify the piece, the movement, who wrote it, and what theme it was. It could be Theme A, or B, or C, or it could be A Prime, B Prime, C Prime, variations on the theme.

We also said last week that as we travel through the Song of Songs, we are going to see four big themes on biblical love between a husband and a wife. These four big themes are: love is specific, love is spoken, love is sexual, and love is steadfast. We are going to also see some variations on these themes throughout the book, as you would in many pieces of poetry or music. My hope is that after we finish this series, whenever you come back to this book these themes will pop into your mind. If you read through chapter one you will say, "There is specific" or "there is steadfast." These themes will begin to jump off of the page as you begin to soak in this beautiful Hebrew poetry—poetry that is literal and historical. This is about two real people that experienced a real love, not just a drama to be acted out or made up to symbolize something else, but a real love given to us as an example to follow.

So last week we began breaking down this question: How do I love my spouse specifically? What does that mean? And we said two things: time and intention. For me to love this person specifically, I must pursue them with time and with intention. I have to be willing to overcome any and every obstacle in life to be able to pursue them. Do you remember we read the scripture

of the man's man—the shepherd who was leaping and bounding and jumping over every obstacle, peering through the latticework? Then there was that moment of arrival—"Arise, my love," in chapter two. All the obstacles had gone. "Come away, winter has gone, now we can spend time together."

How do you love your spouse specifically? Through time and intention. You have probably heard this before, but if you want to figure out where your priorities truly are in life, then you need to look in two places: your checkbook and your calendar. Then you will begin to see where you give all of your time and where you spend all of your resources, and then you will know your true priorities in life.

So in recapping last week the question I leave you with is this: if you went to your calendar, and if you went to your checkbook, how much time and intention would be given to the one that should be your priority second only to God, Himself? Even above children, for those of you who have children, and even above your job. When you have discretionary time, when you have time to give, where do you give it?

The third and fourth idea we are going to look at this week is that loving specifically is done through selflessness, which is not to be confused by the red-headed stepchild selfishness. I am not a counselor. I don't ever want to be a counselor; that is not my gift. But I do give biblical direction. That is my job and I believe I am called to do that. I have sat down with a lot of married people, and 90% of the time when you a couple is in crisis, this is what you will hear. He says, "I want . . ." fill in the blank, and she says, "I want . . ." That is what it comes down to 90% of the time. He could be saying, "I just want some time to get away, some time to decompress. I want some stress relief. I want some time with the guys. I just want to be able to watch the ballgame. Whatever it is, I want." And she is saying, "I just want a partner. I just want help. I don't want to be in this alone. I want. I want."

If that is what it comes down to 90% of the time, it is the wrong question, the wrong attitude, and the wrong conversation to be having. When you get to the point of "I want, I want," that is

symptomatic of a very deep issue, one that we are going to look at today in these very first passages of scripture.

**Song of Solomon. How do I love specifically? Selflessness.** Look at chapter two. We are going to begin reading in verse eight, which we read last week. This is that pursuit of time with intention, and I am going to read down through verse 16: "The voice of my beloved! Behold, he comes, leaping over the mountains, bounding over the hills." This is the shepherd in pursuit of his love. "My beloved is like a gazelle or a young stag. Behold, there he stands behind our wall, gazing through the windows . . .," hear that intention, ". . . looking through the lattice. My beloved speaks and says to me: "Arise, my love, my beautiful one, and come away, for behold, the winter is past; the rain is over and gone. The flowers appear on the earth, the time of singing has come." This is the way that he thinks about time with her, ". . . for behold, the winter is past; the rain is over and gone. The flowers appear on the earth, the time of singing has come, and the voice of the turtledove is heard in our land. The fig tree ripens its figs, and the vines are in blossom; they give forth fragrance. Arise, my love, my beautiful one, and come away. O my dove, in the clefts of the rock, in the crannies of the cliff, let me see your face, let me hear your voice, for your voice is sweet, and your face is lovely. Catch the foxes for us, the little foxes that spoil the vineyards, for our vineyards are in blossom." Here is verse 16, one of the most beautiful verses in this entire book: "My beloved is mine, and I am his." My beloved is mine and I am his—there is not a more selfless phrase you could utter to your spouse. My beloved is mine and I am his. I have given every single ounce of who I am away to that person. My beloved is mine and I am his. Selflessness.

Flip over to chapter six with me, to verse one: "Where has your beloved gone, O most beautiful among women? Where has your beloved turned, that we may seek him with you?" She responds, "My beloved has gone down to his garden to the beds of spices, to graze in the gardens and to gather lilies. I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine." Selflessness. I have given away every single aspect of who I am to this person that I am in love with. Selflessness.

Go back like we did last week to Genesis, chapter two, verse 24. We see that God created man and all of these beautiful things, and then He created woman as a partner for man. Sin had not

yet entered the world. Chapter two, verse 24 says: "Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh." To leave and cleave is what the King James says, the one we are so familiar with. In other words to "hold fast" or to "stick to" his wife, and they shall become one flesh.

Do you think you have married somebody with deep ties to their family? You don't even know what it means to be close to your family until you get into the mindset of this ancient Hebrew culture. This word wasn't just given to Adam and Eve; this was spoken by the very mouth of God to marriages from that day forward. You must give up all allegiances to everything else so that you can truly give up yourself to your spouse in order to be selfless, to leave, to depart, to become one flesh, to cleave, to forsake. Isn't that a strong word—the Hebrew word can be translated *forsake*.

I don't think that means to hate your family. We see throughout the New Testament, and even some places in the Old Testament, that we should love our mother and father. But he is communicating here the enormity that we need to give ourselves completely and selflessly to our spouse, the one that we love, and there can be no strings attached any more anywhere else. I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine. I have given myself completely to them and they, in turn, have given themselves completely to me.

In salvation history, if you look at the next page in Genesis you will see the fall. The fall is just a phrase that we use to talk about when and how sin entered the world; this was a dramatic shift in time when the sin nature became a reality for us, forever.

So this idea of how God designed marriage gets thwarted in Genesis chapter three as our sin begins to take over. Then when we get all the way to Romans, chapter one, we see what Paul begins to talk about: "For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God . . . ." Don't you know that when He created Eve and this idea of marriage, when He created this idea of selflessness, to leave and cleave, to forsake and become one flesh, it was for His glory? You,

Adam and Eve, will experience the greatest joy by thriving in my creation of marriage. So Paul says, "Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things." See how it references back to creation? "Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves, who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature . . . "—selfishness—. . . rather than the Creator."

The design of marriage, the heart of God, was for us to give ourselves completely to another in selflessness. But when sin entered in you can see this snowball all the way to where we are today. And I don't need to tell you where we are today; you guys know where we are today in marriage.

When I was a kid I loved baseball cards. Anybody else in here collect baseball cards? Good, we got a few. Some of you look a little ashamed, but it's okay. I loved baseball cards and there was this whole economic system of trading baseball cards, all these unwritten rules you knew and followed. For example there were some cards that were untouchable. I had a Ken Griffey Jr. Rookie card, 1989 I think it was, and back then that was a big deal. It's probably not as big a deal today, but I had it and we just didn't talk about it. You didn't ask to trade for my Ken Griffey Jr. because it was unacceptable. But you knew that you could talk about all of my other cards. So my buddy might say, "Okay, I'll give you this Nolan Ryan and I'll give you this Tom Glavine for that Bagwell Rookie card." There was this bartering back and forth. And I might say back, "You got to throw in that Biseo Rookie card." We lived in Kingwood at this time so I was in Houston and the Astros were the big deal. So we just bartered and traded—I'll give you this if you give me that—but there were some things we would not even talk about; they were completely off limits.

That is the way we handle marriage, isn't it? I'll give you this if you give me that. You want a little time? You give me a little A, B, C and D, but don't you even ask about my Ken Griffey Jr. Rookie card; that is off limits, not even a topic of conversation. You want me to help do some dishes with you? That's fine, but I need to be able to watch at least two football games a week. Barter and trade.

Guys, listen, that is not selflessness. That is nowhere near selflessness. That is bartering and trading. We need to be able to say, "I give myself completely to you."

I want to give you three very practical ideas of how to love selflessly. These are not on your worship guide. Sometimes things happen after the guide is printed and I apologize. What are some practical things that I can do to love selflessly? Number one—practice the art of listening. Men, listening and hearing are two different things. Hearing is when she says something to you, and your eyes are on the TV or a magazine or a book, and you nod or grunt but you don't respond. That is hearing. Listening is looking into her eyes when she tells you something and responding back with something that really indicates you are in and part of the conversation. That is listening.

Ladies, for you as well, depending on who you are married to because I know some of the men in here are the talkers in the relationship, listening is looking him in the eyes and being involved in what he is saying. Practice the art of listening.

Number two, practice the art of discovery. What does that mean? When you are reunited—whether it is a spouse coming home from work or both of you coming home from work or it is the first thing in the morning—what if you got into the mind and heart of your spouse? What if before they had a chance to say anything you asked, "How was your day? How did you feel today?" You had problems in the classroom, teachers? What if your husband said, "I am sorry, is there anything that I can do to help you?" The art of discovery is being involved in that conversation in a way that pulls things out and lets the other person know you care intentionally about them. Practice the art of listening and the art of discovery.

Third, practice the art of forgiveness. How do I love selflessly? Practice the art of forgiveness. I think pride is one of the greatest enemies of biblical love. I've got a challenge for you: if you thought back to any argument you had with your spouse where the tension between you lasted longer than 30 minutes, I would venture to say that pride was the reason it lasted so long. Husbands and wives, if you reach a point where it becomes all about not letting down . . . *I am*

*not going to be vulnerable. I am not going to lose this. No way, I am right and there is no other option. I am not going to back down . . . that is pride. Arguments last for days in marriages. You guys know what I am talking about. That is merely pride. It is pride when you don't say, "Look, I am sorry, I could be wrong here. I feel really strongly about this, but I love you more than I feel strongly about this." Beginning to talk things through is practicing the art of forgiveness. How do you love selflessly? Listening, discovery and forgiveness.*

**Number four, adoration. How do we love specifically? Time, intention, selflessness and adoration.** Let's look at Song of Songs, chapter four, verse 9: "*You have captivated my heart, my sister, my bride; you have captivated my heart . . .*" and the Hebrew text here could be translated *stolen*, "*. . . with one glance of your eyes, with one jewel of your necklace. How beautiful is your love, my sister, my bride! How much better is your love than wine, and the fragrance of your oils than any spice!*" Adoration. You have stolen my heart.

When you see the phrase "my sister" in the Hebrew text, it is not anything nasty or weird. That is merely saying you are also my friend. You have stolen my heart as my best friend, my lover, my bride, and my partner for life. You have captivated me. If you are captivated by something, is there any room in your heart for anything else? Has your attention ever been so captivated, so completely and utterly involved in something visually that nothing going on around you could distract you?

You have captivated my heart. I adore you. I love you so much that nothing can get in the way of my pursuit, my time, and my selflessness of you. My heart is yours and no one or nothing else's. Now I will be honest, guys, I am not the best romantic. I don't watch chick flicks. Here is my rule for watching a movie: more than one person has to die of something other than natural causes. Okay? That is just the way it is. More than one person has to die of something other than natural causes. That means people have to get shot. That is just the way it is; that is how and why I watch a movie, but I know enough to know that this is romantic. "*You have captivated my heart with one glance of your eyes.*" That defines adoration. I completely adore you, value you, and exalt who you are. With one glance of your eyes everything in me is focused on you and

your love. Adoration. In verse ten, "How beautiful is your love, my sister, my bride! How much better is your love than wine."

What he is saying is that you are more intoxicating than wine itself. Your love—who you are—is so captivating that I am intoxicated by you. That is adoration. That is focus. That is love; "... and the fragrance of your oils than any spice." Your smell, your essence. You see in this culture the smell of someone represented who they were. It is like our names are to us—they represent us. Well, their smell also represented them because they didn't wear cologne or deodorant. As bad as that might sound to us everybody had a smell and he is saying, "Your smell is beautiful."

Now here he is a shepherd working out in the fields, a sweaty guy in an ancient Palestinian-type of geography, and he is hot, he is sweaty, he is nasty. And we see further in the text where he talks about her skin being dark; that means she worked outside. Light skin was considered beautiful in that culture because it meant a person had enough money to be inside. How different than our culture today. So she was dark skinned and worked hard outside. Here you have got two people that worked outside all day in the Middle East, and he is basically saying, "Your smell is better than any fragrant oils that I have ever smelled before." That's adoration.

The word love, which is used so much between a husband and wife, is found through adoration. When I think back for a minute to the beginning of my relationship with my spouse, at first we called it love, but I don't know if it was really love. I have been married for 12 years to Laurie—been with her for a little over 13—and I was infatuated with her. I adored her. But I can confidently say now that I am completely in love with her because I have learned over 12 years what it means to be in love. Love isn't just an emotion. Adoration has a lot to do with emotion, and adoration fuels love. You hear that in the language of the text here: captivated by you; the way you look; the way you smell; who you are. Adoration is the first thing you see and experience with the one you married. Then that adoration gives way to an understanding where love can be grasped.

I have talked to couples before, and the saddest thing I have ever heard a spouse say is, "I don't love him or her anymore." I have heard that probably only three or four times, and when it has

gotten to that point, they have lost this adoration element. These words . . . I give everything I am up to you; I give my time and intention; I am going to overcome every obstacle to be with you and spend time with you; I adore you; I am captivated by you . . . is what happens along the way—a snowball effect.

Do you remember in geometry when you learned about lines? I remember the first time our teacher taught us that if a line had an arrow on the end, that meant it went on forever. I was so bugged by that. I thought . . . *do you mean if this line has got two dots it stops on the chalkboard, but if it has got an arrow it really goes past the chalkboard?* That was really hard for me to get. But the angle was even harder to understand. An angle with a point and two arrows meant that both of those lines went on forever past the chalkboard. Even more baffling was the farther the line went off the chalkboard, the larger and larger the angle became between them. At the start, the distance between these two is just a little bit, but then it grows, and if it has an arrow on the end it grows forever.

That is what happens in a marriage as soon as we stop this adoration element, as soon as we stop being captivated. Once I begin to give one tiny crumb of my heart to anything but my spouse, there goes the trajectory. And the crumb ends up growing to be a morsel, then a meal, then a buffet until we get down the road and are saying, "I just don't love him anymore." Can you imagine what that does to the heart of God?

In chapter two, verse two, listen to the adoration. I know for the guys this may not work for us today, but it meant a lot back then: "[As a lily among brambles, so is my love among the young women.](#)" When I first read this I thought . . . *what is this? Is he was saying he loves all the young women?* We need to clarify this and see that "my love" is the spouse. So maybe it should be capitalized: "[As a lily is among brambles, so is My love \[the individual\] among the young women.](#)"

He is saying that her beauty is a beauty among thorns. She is a beautiful flower among all of the thorns of the field. She is incredible to him. Now guys, we just talked about the reality that she was not a knock down, drag out beauty queen. She was dark skinned and she worked, with her

hands, outside all day. He said she smelled good but we know she stank. But he is saying she is the lily, the rose among all of the other thorns and weeds. Adoration—completely captivated with no room in his mind or his heart for anyone or anything else.

Men, I should have apologized last week so I am going to do it now. I have a passion for men and marriage, and for men to get it right, so if I ride you a little bit hard I am sorry. That is just the way God wired me. But there isn't anything that bugs me more than to see a married man gawking at another female when he is with his spouse. He is saying with his actions and his eyes, "You are not valued by me." Now hear this. Temptation is not sin. Temptation is a reality, but falling into temptation is where sin begins. Guys, we were wired as visual people, so if we see somebody beautiful pass by, that is not sinful. But if we begin to start following them, then it becomes sinful because that means there is a morsel, at least a crumb of room in your heart for someone other than your bride. You are not captivated by your bride.

My challenge to you is to get back to that place of adoration where you are completely captivated with no one else but your spouse. Now, ladies, the majority of the time when affairs happen, and women are the instigators, it is called an "emotional affair." What that means is a female begins to look to another male for an emotional connection—somebody else who will listen, somebody else who will comfort. Then a morsel, a crumb, creeps in and there goes the angle. She is no longer completely captivated and giving 100% of herself to her spouse; rather she has let some other man in to fulfill her need. Ladies, that means you are no longer captivated by your spouse, so I challenge you to look to him for those needs, to fulfill those emotional connections.

Men, the definition of adoration for us is in Ephesians, chapter five. There are two places we will bounce around in as we go through this series. Some of it is back to creation in Genesis, chapter two, and of course forward to Ephesians, chapter five. Adoration to us, men, has been compared to Christ, Himself, adoring his bride, the church. Now it doesn't get any more captivated than to die for the one you love. Die. Give up everything. You want to talk about sacrificial and selflessness! I am going to give up my life in the most painful death imaginable for the bride I love. Adoration.

That is what it means for us to be captivated by our brides. Look at what the Shulamite woman says in chapter five, verse 10: "[My beloved is radiant and ruddy . . .](#)," again this is something a little cultural that means *outstanding* . . . "[distinguished among ten thousand.](#)" You see this theme repeated from her side now. My beloved is radiant. He is outstanding. He is amazing among 10,000 other men and I would seek him, find him and pick him every time. Adoration. To love specifically, to love selflessly, to love biblically means to adore in that way.

Guys, I said it last week and I will say it again every week: living under God's beautiful creation of love and marriage is not about survival. His idea and His goal for us is to thrive under His great creation of marriage. We are to thrive in the covenant of marriage and the overwhelming joy He has specifically created, which brings Him glory. Thriving under this kind of biblical, God-ordained and God-created love is a gift given to you and I.

Finally, again this series is not about guilt trips; it is about fresh starts. Every single step of the way over the next five weeks, as we get deeper into this book, it is about saying, "Today I choose to do this." Any and every step along the way, if you realize that you have been giving a piece of yourself to somebody besides your spouse then stop, turn and never do it again. The grace of the cross gives us the ability to do that—to begin a fresh start of living under the thriving biblical creation of marriage.

So as we are about to enter this time of response in prayer, get up and pray with somebody or pray with your spouse right there and say, "Today I am making this new covenant. I am resolved this day to live and love selflessly, to live and love in adoration of the one that God gave me." That is what this is about.

Your goal for this week is at the bottom of this worship guide. Ask your spouse this question: How can I better serve your desires and needs? Guys, I am on this journey with you. I asked Laurie this last night just so we could engage in this before this morning. I love my wife and I think we communicate very well. I am proud of my marriage, but when we had that conversation she told me something that I did not know. She replied with a very practical idea, and I thought .

. . . yes, that is great! *Here is a way that I can now love her more because we had that conversation.* Husbands and wives, this week make the time to have that conversation. Then follow through with it. Whatever your spouse tells you, follow through and make it happen.