

The Crossings, Matt Powell  
Engage Your Marriage (Week 4)

We have been traveling through Song of Songs, a book written probably 3,000 years ago, and we have been searching through scripture for truth, for instruction on how we are supposed to do this whole marriage thing. And although we have this entire book given to marriage, it is one of the most neglected books in the whole Bible. That makes no sense, does it? One of the most neglected books in the entire Bible, second to Revelation, is Song of Songs and it is the only book given entirely to the true biblical picture of love.

As we have traveled through Songs of Songs, we have divided it into four themes. First we spent two weeks talking about how biblical love between a husband and a wife is specific. Now we are talking about how biblical love between a husband and a wife is spoken. Next week we are going to talk about it being steadfast, and the week after that we are going to talk about what I know you've all been waiting for—sexual. These are the four themes that we see throughout this great, neglected book of the Bible.

As I have confessed before, I have a horrible sense of direction. If I am going somewhere new and somebody says, "Head out this way like you are going to San Antonio and then head east on Highway xyz," I will never make it because I need turn-by-turn instructions. One time Godfrey and I were out biking with a large group. At one point, a friend of mine, Jake, and I wandered off on our own and wound up in the middle of who-knows-where. We were somewhere near Fulsher by ourselves and were trying to get back to the car, but we ended up on Highway 99. I had no idea where we were, or how to get back to where we started because I needed turn-by-turn directions.

I think this principle is similar to how we are supposed to communicate inside marriage. People say all the time—and I might argue this is not necessarily true—that the most important thing in marriage is communication. You have got to communicate. Yet, you can hear that and say, "That's all fine and dandy, but you're not really telling me when to turn right and when to turn left. I know I need to communicate, but that doesn't tell me exactly how to do communicate correctly."

Last Sunday we took this big-picture look at what love is. I called it the prequel or the *Google Earth* approach. We looked at what we need to understand about love *before* we can ever get down to the specifics—our home, our marriage and our relationship. We then looked at I John, chapter four, and we defined love. We talked about the need to understand the reality of the cross—the ultimate display and definition of what love is in the cross. We also talked about how God is love in that same passage of scripture. Then in John, chapter 15, it says, "Abide in me and abide in my love," so we have to cultivate a relationship with Jesus in order to understand love and to give it away.

With that big picture, that *Google Earth* approach, we are now going to zoom in on our homes and talk about what practical things, according to Song of Songs, we need to do to speak love. I am going to refer to Gary Chapman a couple times this morning because he has handled this topic well. In his book *The Five Love Languages* he talks about a "love tank." Essentially what that means is we all are like the oil in an automobile; something keeps us running—this love tank—in every relationship, whether it be a child/parent relationship or a husband/wife relationship. This love tank has to be constantly refilled because if it goes empty the whole thing will cease up. If your car has ever run out of oil then you know that is not good. I know nothing about cars, but I know enough to realize that it takes the oil to keep all of the parts moving. If the lubricant inside that big machine we depend on runs out of oil, then everything begins to grind up and we are in trouble.

A love tank—that's the way we work. This love tank needs to be filled, and this "in love" phase of marriage usually lasts for about two years. There is a cycle we go through. If you think back . . . and maybe some of you are at this phase right now . . . your relationship began with an adoration phase, then infatuation, then obsession— you were so wrapped up you believed this person could do no wrong—and finally you hit reality. Most scholars think that you hit reality at about two years.

I can't tell you how many couples in premarital counseling have said, "We don't get into arguments." "We've never had a fight." And many times I will say that might be true, because at

that point they are still in the adoration-infatuation phase. But somewhere around two years, that automatic love tank starts to get empty. Then people say, "What happened? When we first got married it was so great and we loved each other so much. We never had all these problems. Then all of a sudden something happened."

But that is the point where we truly begin learning how to speak and communicate love. That is the point where the journey truly begins because all of the blinders have come off and you can begin to really learn about the one whom God has blessed you with in a way you never knew before.

Song of Songs, let's take a look. The first thing that we are going to talk about is spoken love between a husband and wife. How do we do that? Before we start I want to make sure we are on the same page. Here is the reality of life between you and your spouse. Men, whatever your women do during the day, whether they are stay-at-home moms or working outside the home, whatever their day looks like, day in and day out they are constantly being drained and getting beat up. That's life. That's the world we live in.

Ladies, whatever your men do, whether you think they have the least stressful job in the entire world or whether they are a stay-at-home dad, it doesn't matter. Monday through Friday they are getting beat up in the world, disrespected and drained all day long. So when we come home, we have the blessing of being involved in a relationship that can speak needed love to each other. I just wanted you to see that it is not only women who need to hear spoken and communicated love; it is both men and women. It doesn't make a man any less manly because he needs to know that his wife truly loves him. There is nothing wrong with that.

So how do we speak love? Number one—sincere encouragement. Let's look at chapter one, verse 15 and 16. "Behold, you are beautiful, my love; behold, you are beautiful; your eyes are doves." Have you ever heard the phrase, "The eyes are the window into the soul"? He is not just saying, "You've got pretty green eyes." He is saying, "You, who you are, your soul, your very being is beautiful. The essence of you is beautiful." "Behold, you are beautiful, my love; behold,

you are beautiful; your eyes are doves." And she responds in verse 16: "Behold, you are beautiful, my beloved, truly delightful."

Last week in chapter one, verse five, we read her speaking in a very authentic moment: "I am very dark, but lovely." We said that dark skin was not considered beautiful in this culture. Light skin was favored because it meant you had a lot of money and you were indoors. She is saying, "I am very dark, but lovely, O daughters of Jerusalem, like the tents of Kedar, . . ." We talked about those tents made of black goatskin that were splattered across the dessert: ". . . like the curtains of Solomon." Again, darkness. "Do not gaze at me because I am dark, because the sun has looked upon me." She is saying, "Because I have had to work outside, don't stare at me.

"My mother's sons were angry with me, they made me keeper of the vineyards . . ." Now she is justifying. She is saying, "They made me work outside and that is why I look this way." "They made me keeper of the vineyards, but my own vineyard I have not kept." She is saying, "I am dark skinned. I am not the culture's definition of physical beauty because I was forced to work outside." And just a few verses later, men, he says, "Behold, you are beautiful, my love; behold, you are beautiful; your eyes are doves."

Do you see the listening needed here? Do you understand she is sharing how she feels? Here is this authentic, vulnerable moment for this Shulamite woman—her self-esteem. She is sharing her blemishes. And he responds: "How beautiful you are."

If we are to practice sincere encouragement, husbands and wives, we must understand our spouse's needs; we must be listening and discovering. We talked about this a few weeks ago. How do you love specifically? By practicing the art of listening and discovery. We have to hear and to know how our spouse is feeling. We have to participate in their lives. We have to be a partner with them to know what their struggles are and how we can best encourage them—specifically and sincerely.

Just to share a little bit about my life, Lori knows what Sundays are like for me. On Sunday morning I am running at 100 miles per hour, and by five or six o'clock I crash. This is due to a number of reasons: partly physical, partly spiritual, and partly emotional. But Lori knows that

rhythm of my life on Sundays; she understands the roller coaster. And she knows how to speak to me because she has listened and learned who I am, so she is able to give me what I need.

Listen to how they speak love to one another in chapter one, verse eight: "If you do not know, O most beautiful among women . . ." And in chapter two, verses two and three: "As a lily among brambles, so is my love among the young women; as an apple tree among the trees of the forest, so is my beloved among the young men." Do you hear what word constantly keeps coming back? Among.

What he is saying is, "I choose you. I still choose you. It's not just about my wedding day and announcing to the world that we are getting married so I can check off the box. No, he is saying, "I chose you then and I still choose you today." We need to constantly be practicing how we speak. So number one is we communicate through sincere encouragement.

Number two on your worship guide is acting out specific examples. Men and women, we all need to hear, "I choose you," but we also need to see it demonstrated as well. In talking about how to communicate biblical love, we communicate in two ways, don't we? We communicate through our words, and we communicate through our actions. We speak love by what we say as well as by what we do. Two things that we need to remember: we need to say, "I choose you among all others . . . not just on my wedding day but I still choose you today by the words that I am saying to you." Intentional words. "But I also choose you, just you, intentionally through my actions."

If I could choose one word for this whole series it would be "intentional." Either that or "selfless"—I wrestled between those two. But over and over intentional has come up. I have to be intentional about the words that I am using: "I choose you among all others today," but also by the way I spend my time.

Remember chapter two, verse eight? "The voice of my beloved! Behold, he comes, leaping over the mountains . . ." We already defined that this shepherd was a man's man. He still bounds over the hills. "My beloved is like a gazelle or a young stag. Behold, there he stands behind our wall, gazing through the windows, 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, and the voice of the turtledove is heard in our land."

He overcomes all the obstacles intentionally, communicating, "Among everybody, I choose you" by his actions, willing to do anything and everything it takes to pursue the one he loves. Then we see, "Arise my love and come. Winter is past, the rain is gone." He has overcome everything so that love is communicated intentionally. My actions choose you; not just my words.

Remember how we discussed that our priorities are evident through two things: our calendar and our pocketbook? If we were to put your calendar up on a wall and opened a discussion about your priorities, what would we see? Now don't get me wrong; it's not a matter of adding up the hours. Sure you are going to be at work a lot of hours, but what if we looked at how you choose to use your discretionary time. Would it show you choosing your spouse above everything else in your life aside from the Father Himself?

Think about what things you need to change, to cut out, to move around that would speak louder than any words you could say to your spouse to communicate, "I choose you, not only among the other women or men, but among all of the interests, the hobbies, and the desires of my life. I choose you." What are the practical things that you can do? Number one, we speak love through sincere encouragement by listening and by understanding. Number two, speak by specific example—intentionally, verbally and practically saying, "I choose you."

Now number three is really the vast amount of what we see in this entire book Song of Songs. Selfless emotion. We are going to read some text here to get the big picture. Look at chapter four, verse one: "Behold, 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. Your 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. Your lips are like a scarlet thread, and your mouth is lovely. Your cheeks are like halves of a pomegranate behind your veil. 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. Your two breasts are like two fawns, twins of a gazelle that graze among the lilies. Until the day breathes and the shadows flee, I will go away to the mountain of

myrrh and the hill of frankincense. You are altogether beautiful, my love; there is no flaw in you."

Men, some of these things are not directly applicable. You don't need to tell your wife that she is any of these things. I remember one time in high school I was with one of my close friends at his grandparent's house in Crocket, Texas. I noticed this black and white picture on the wall, so I went over to check it out. Well, he saw me looking at it, and in the most serious tone of voice he said, "Fine looking heifer, isn't she?"

I didn't know what to do. I didn't want to turn around, and I didn't want to laugh because I knew he was serious and she meant a lot to him. But you see, in different cultures and different times, words can mean different things. So in Song of Songs, what he was essentially doing is using all of this beautiful imagery to compare with the emotional sincerity of his feelings about his spouse.

Look at chapter five, verse 10: "My beloved is radiant and ruddy, distinguished among ten thousand. His head is the finest gold; his locks are wavy, black as a raven. His eyes are like doves beside streams of water, bathed in milk, sitting beside a full pool. His cheeks are like beds of spices, mounds of sweet-smelling herbs. His lips are lilies, dripping liquid myrrh. His arms are rods of gold, set with jewels." Women, you might be able to use this one, this is pretty good: "His body is polished ivory bedecked with sapphires. His legs are alabaster columns, set on bases of gold." Do you hear this selfless emotion being communicated? You cannot have an ounce of pride and use this kind of language. You can't be thinking, "How do I sound right now?" No. You are letting it all go and communicating directly from the heart. That is what this book is full of.

Let's keep going to chapter six, verse four: "You are beautiful as Tirzah, my love, lovely as Jerusalem, awesome as an army with banners. Turn away your eyes from me, for they overwhelm me—" Selfless emotion. You are overwhelming who I am. Once more, let's look at chapter seven, verse one: "How beautiful are your feet in sandals, O noble daughter!" He has started at the head and has worked his way down to the hair, the eyes, and all the way down to the feet. "How beautiful are your feet in sandals, O noble daughter! Your rounded thighs are like

jewels, the work of a master hand. Your navel is a rounded bowl that never lacks mixed wine."

This is detail. This is the emotional language communicating love between these two.

Lori has a stack of e-mail printouts that we exchanged when we first started dating in college. To some of you this may mean nothing, but with dot matrix printers you had to print on these green striped pages with little holes on one side, and that was how it tracked in the printer. Well I was reading through those e-mails the other day and entertaining the idea of reading some of them to you, but I decided that wasn't a good idea.

Do you remember that point in your life when you said things to the one you loved that would be extremely rare for you to say again? You know the language and the emotion you used to communicate when your relationship began years ago? Well, I did find one piece I could share with you; it is a poem Lori wrote to me in 2001, and it still sits on my nightstand today, right next to my side of the bed. We had been married for three and a half years at this point.

Thank you for loving me. I am so blessed to be your wife, that God has blessed us with this life. To have and to hold forever will be; thank you for loving me. The good Lord brought our lives together, and soon we'll be three . . . this was before we had our first child . . . and soon we will be three. I cannot wait to see you hold her; thank you for loving me. You are my provider and my strength, my lover, shelter, best friend, soulmate; I stand amazed God's fulfilling my dreams. Thank you for loving me. Happy Valentines Day, 2001.

This is emotional language. It is dear to me and I cherish it. Guys, I know some of you are thinking . . . *I don't know how to do that. I don't know how to communicate that way. I am not as good as this shepherd in Song of Songs.*

Well here it is. I am going to give it to you very simply. Write something, say something, or make something that no one else would care about but your spouse. That does not mean you are going to be what you see on TV. You are not going to write a top 40 hit song, you are not going to write a poem that might be published in the next anthology of love poems, and you are not going to make the greatest thing that could be sold at Pier One, because other people would care about all of that.

But you are going to say something, you are going to write something, or you are going to make something that no one else would care about but your spouse. That is selfless, vulnerable emotional language. I challenge you to do that. When was the last time you spoke in a way that even resembled the very first six months of your relationship? When was the last time you spoke in a way that was so selfless, so unfiltered that you began to communicate your emotions without caring about what anybody else would say or think?

That's what we are reading here. He could care less what the other men were saying about him. She could care less what the other ladies were saying about her. She is in love and he is in love. And with all filters removed, in the most selfless, vulnerable, emotionally sincere way they know, they are communicating and speaking actions and words of love. How are you communicating with your spouse today?

We tend to feel ashamed about communicating and talking about this stuff, but we have got to keep reminding ourselves that this book, this language, is in the Bible. God desires for us to be madly in love with the spouse He has brought to our side, and there is nothing to feel ashamed about. Nothing. It is glorifying to God and it is worship when we speak in these ways with our spouse.

Remember back in Genesis, chapter two, God was the Creator of it all. He desired for the husband and wife to become one flesh, to be infatuated and captivated with one another above and beyond all else. Some of you may be at the same stage of life as me; you have got a couple kids. But God wants you to be infatuated above and beyond those kids and their schedule and needs. If you don't, what will happen is you will probably do a great job raising them, but when they are grown and out of the house you will find yourself living with a stranger because you put everything you had into those kids, no longer captivated by the spouse who walked by your side all those years.

What would improve your marriage most? I will give you two answers today that you can apply to your life right away and see radical transformation inside your home. Number one is what we said last week: Jesus. Abide in Him, abide in His love, develop a relationship with Him, follow Him, realize His grace that was shed on the cross on your behalf so you could live this abundant

life of knowing Him and walking in community with Him. If you begin that journey of getting to know Him, you will radically change your marriage. Some of you may have begun that journey 20, 30, 50 years ago. Just get back into engaging.

Last week we also defined engaging in truth as reading scripture, engaging in prayer, engaging in community with people around you, and engaging in mission—letting that inflow turn into outflow. Begin cultivating this relationship with the One that died for you and engage in truth. It's the greatest thing you can do for your marriage.

The second greatest thing you can do for your marriage is communicate love in a way that is specific, sincere and selfless like we talked about today. I have got two goals for you. I hope you are tracking along with us on these goals every week, because if you are I guarantee you will see things happening because these are things we see in the Bible.

Goal number one: write a love letter to your spouse. Remember those letters you used to write years ago? I want you to write a love letter to your spouse. Now don't go get a Hallmark card and copy what they say and give it to your spouse. I want *you* to sit down and write a love letter to your spouse; it might be one paragraph or it might be 10 pages. Maybe you have got a lot of things built up and you will write something similar to the Song of Songs. That would be fabulous. But write a love letter to your spouse. Take time this week to do that.

Goal number two, I will give you an assessment to take. Earlier I mentioned Gary Chapman's book *The Five Love Languages*. As with any marriage book, there is a lot of cheese, but Gary has done a masterful job of communicating the reality of needing to learn about our spouses. Many of us have gotten into this marriage relationship with a kind of a temporary Visa mentality. We haven't set up citizenship within our marriage; we haven't begun to learn the marriage language of the one at our side.

Gary Chapman writes about learning *how* your spouse needs to hear love. How do you speak it specifically through words or actions to your spouse? So your second goal this week is to take this 20-question assessment. I will put it on the web; it will take you about 10 minutes to go through and click on the bubbles. Then you can sit down with your spouse and say, "I know what my language is—quality time speaks love to me. That's what love is."

Lori and I took this assessment and then we sat down and talked about how we could better communicate love to each other and speak it sincerely—to speak it biblically as we know we are called to do. This assessment gave us the tools to be able have that conversation.

So your goals this week are to write a love letter to your spouse, even if it has been 50 years since you have done that, and then take the assessment and talk with your spouse about the way they desire to feel love the most. Is that doable?

My prayer for us as we move forward in this series is that as we look at these tiny tidbits of themes in the Song of Songs; the specific, the intentional, and the spoken; how they have communicated love; the steadfastness; and we will get into the sexual; and we will begin to see all the pieces of the puzzle come together to show us how to thrive in marriage, not just survive under some commitment or some contract that we might have made years ago. So my challenge to you is to engage in marriage through these practical ways we see jumping out of scripture that have the power to radically transform your homes.