

The Crossings, Matt Powell  
Engage Your Marriage (Week 5)

"Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us." (Romans 5:1-5).

You may be wondering why I am reading this passage five weeks into this marriage series. The reason is this: as we have talked week after week about how we *should* spend our time and what we *should* be doing to love biblically, there is a temptation to respond in one of two ways: either we will get really good at elbowing our spouse sitting next to us, or we will feel an overwhelming guilt about all the areas we fall short in.

So the significance of this text is to serve as a reminder: "[Through Him we have obtained access by faith into the grace.](#)" You see, we have a unique opportunity that the majority of people we know, live with, and work with don't have. For those of us who have chosen to live under the shadow of the cross and who have embraced the reality that Jesus shed his blood to appease the wrath of an Almighty God to give us eternal life, we have a hope that is better than any circumstance life could throw at us. Regardless of what happened yesterday, a year ago, or over the past 15 to 20 years, by grace we have a new chance every day to move forward on a new path, to make new decisions and new choices.

Maybe some of you were here on February 14th when we began this series and I talked about a great moment in baseball history. I told you about Babe Ruth in the 1932 World Series. The Cubs were playing at Wrigley Field and they were giving him a really hard time. Just picture this for a minute and see it play out. If you are not a baseball fan, maybe you have been to a Little League game and you can just hear this chatter coming at Babe Ruth from the other team. Amidst all of that opposition and verbal attack, what did he do? He got up and pointed out

toward centerfield. Then, within two pitches, he batted the ball 441 feet over the fence in Wrigley Field to centerfield—right where he pointed.

Now just think of the risk and steadfast determination it took for Babe Ruth to do that with the other team constantly chattering at him, throwing names and calling him everything in the book. He had everything to risk. What if he had pointed at centerfield and didn't make it? Think how his trouble would have been magnified. But no, he was determined that nothing else was going to happen but hitting that ball 441 feet into centerfield. There was no other option in his mind.

This is my challenge again to you today. As we look into Song of Songs at this theme that biblical love is steadfast, I challenge you to look at the relationship you are in today with that kind of resolve. *I have no other option in my mind. There is no other thought here. Amidst all the difficulty, amidst everybody pointing their fingers at me, I am going to hit this thing 441 feet . . . I am going to knock it out of the park.*

I wanted to remind you that as we have been traveling through Song of Songs, we have been looking at it in a different way. Normally here at the Crossings, we go through the books of the Bible line by line. But Song of Songs is different because it is a collection of songs, a collection of poems. We said that when you are looking at poetry you are essentially looking at art, so you must look at it a little bit differently; you have got to engage the side of your brain that is not normally engaged when moving line by line.

So in looking at this piece of artwork we have been bouncing around from chapter to chapter, and we have identified four major themes for biblical love between a husband and wife: it is specific, it is spoken, it is steadfast, and it is sexual. Today we are looking at steadfast. What is amazing is that this entire book, and all of the power written here, is one of the most neglected books in the Bible second only to the book of Revelation. How many people in this world are married, and yet the one book given to biblical love is one of the most neglected books of the Bible?

I don't know if any of you are sleep talkers, but I confess that I talk in my sleep. So whatever is consuming my mind at the time will show up in my dreams. Now I am not a psychologist, so I don't know if that is normal or not, but whatever is on my mind when I fall asleep, I dream about.

Well a few years back I was reading Colon Powell's biography just before bedtime, and I was at the part where he was walking through Vietnam. A few minutes after I fell asleep, I suddenly woke up shouting, "The helicopters are coming! The helicopters are coming!" Lori, who was at my side, was so startled that she didn't know what to do. And about week or two ago, the same thing happened. I began to shout in my sleep and woke up, and I scared Lori so bad that she jumped. Now you are probably wondering why I am telling you this.

What we see today is that steadfast love demands pursuit. As we look at chapter three, verse one, we see a person so captivated and so in love that she is dreaming about the one she loves. I want to read to you chapter three, verse one through five. Steadfast love demands pursuit. "[On my bed by night I sought him whom my soul loves; I sought him, but found him not. I will rise now and go about the city, in the streets and in the squares; I will seek him whom my soul loves. I sought him . . .](#)" Notice this moves to the past tense; she has been looking, she has been pursuing . . . "[I sought him, but found him not.](#)" She's out in the city, she is looking everywhere for this shepherd, she is pursuing but she doesn't find him.

Verse three: "[The watchmen found me . . .](#)" You can see the watchmen, who were probably guards, looking at this woman running around. Oftentimes the walls of a city were thick for a defense reasons and the guards stood on top of the walls. "[I sought him, but found him not. The watchmen found me as they went about in the city. 'Have you seen him whom my soul loves?' Scarcely had I passed them when I found him whom my soul loves. I held him, and would not let him go until I had brought him into my mother's house, and into the chamber of her who conceived me. I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, by the gazelles or the does of the field that you not stir up or awaken until it pleases.](#)"

In week one if you recall we said that in order to love biblically you must love through time and intention. We looked at several places in chapter two where the shepherd intentionally overcame

all obstacles to find her. Remember that freaky moment where the shepherd was looking through the latticework at her? He had overcome all of the obstacles, he was leaping and bounding, and he was looking through the latticework pursuing her with time and intention.

But today we can see the reality that this it is not a one-time-intention thing. It is not about pursuit, pursuit, pursuit—courtship—wedding—done—got that taken care of. Biblical love between a husband and a wife is steadfast, and that steadfastness demands a pursuit that is not a sprint, but a marathon to say the least. It is a constant pursuit with constant time and intention. That means the things we did to overcome all obstacles when we were dating were not just a stage we were going through.

In chapter two, verses one through eight, he is overcoming all of his obstacles, he is climbing the hills and he is coming to find her; but you also see her having this dream where she is searching through the city, running around asking people about him. I can see her with the watchman, shaking him. This is in Matt's head, not the Bible—I see this stuff play out like movies sometimes. You see her asking, "Where is the one I love?" And she is freaking out because she can't find him. Pursuing constantly. It is not just an event-driven pursuit because an event-driven pursuit would be just a moment in time, then you would be done with it. Instead, you must develop constant *habits* of pursuit, and that's my challenge to you today. Let me give you three ways to develop habits of pursuit.

First is to engage daily. We talked about this in week one and it requires time and intention. My challenge to you was to spend 15 minutes a day with nothing between you and your spouse's face but the air. Just 15 minutes. That means no laptop, no Sports Center on TV, no phone. Engage daily without distractions. That is not an event in time, but a habit of pursuit.

Second is to engage simply. We tend to overwhelm ourselves and make elaborate plans instead of keeping it simple. If you could stop, sit, and take time just to talk everyday you would be amazed what it would do in your home. You don't need to plan a huge meal. You don't need to go out and get steaks. Just get the kids to bed and spend 15 minutes alone with each other. You may find that you will get to know that person again like you haven't in many years.

Engage daily, engage simply, and third—engage spiritually. How do you keep up a life long pursuit? By the grace of God. By pursuing Him and letting Him grow that pursuit in you between you and your spouse. I did a wedding this week and it was fun coming on top of studying Song of Songs because I had a lot of new, fresh ideas. Pastors usually have a typical idea they communicate in every wedding, and I mentioned before that I tell every couple the one greatest thing they can ever do is fall in love with Jesus anew every day. If a married couple can get that, then their home will be radically transformed. I know you are probably wondering what this has to do with pursuit, but engage spiritually, just try it and I guarantee you will be amazed.

Next steadfast love between a husband and wife demands protection. This is a great passage in chapter two, verse 14: "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, . . ." this could also be translated jackals. "Catch the foxes for us, the little foxes that spoil the vineyards, for our vineyards are in blossom."

I want to make some observations here. If we step back in the world for a minute to Hebrew culture, foxes were little animals, like a raccoon or a badger, that would sneak into the vineyards and ruin the crops. They looked harmless, but these little foxes would come in and begin eating the flowers that were blooming, so the grapes could never grow.

Notice who gives the challenge here. This is the bride speaking to the husband. "Catch the foxes for us." This challenge is given to the male as protector. We previously looked at a passage in Ephesians chapter five which shows something really cool. If you haven't read it before go home and read it tonight. It compares the husband's role to that of Christ's role with the church. If you think about what that means, if you look at the metaphor of how Christ is described in comparison to his bride, the church, you will see two major metaphors: the lion and the lamb. The lamb in Isaiah 53 is the sacrificial lamb—sacrificial leadership for the church—laying down everything for the sake of the one that he loves, the bride, the church. But you also see the lion—fierce—the king.

The lion and the lamb. I think in this text what we see is the call to be the lion in pursuit of the foxes as protector of the home, protector of the marriage. Interestingly, the fox was more than a reality; it was a cultural metaphor for them. Aristotle, Socrates and Plato also wrote about foxes metaphorically and how despite their small size and conniving nature, they had the power to destroy huge things.

Archeologists have even found pictures on ancient pottery of people hunting little foxes. How big a deal this was to them. These animals could destroy their livelihood. There was no bail out plan 3,000 years ago. If foxes destroyed their vineyard and crop, what did they do? Call up the Farm Bureau and ask for help? No. They were devastated. Hopefully they had friends and family to help them survive.

The comparison here is that the vineyard is the relationship. The foxes take the flowers and prevent them from growing and becoming a healthy crop of grapes. As we read her words, "[Catch the foxes, the little foxes that spoil the vineyards, for our vineyards are in blossom.](#)" She is saying, "We are vulnerable here with these little foxes. If they get to the blossoms then our potential, our vineyard, our ability to thrive under God's creation of marriage will be damaged."

In our culture we have a tendency to focus on the big things like being faithful to your spouse. I am not saying that we shouldn't focus on that. We need to focus on that. But we tend to focus on the big issues because they make media, and we neglect the small foxes which eat away at marriage the majority of the time—like irresponsible financial management. I can't tell you how many times I have talked to couples whose little fox was debt. *I want something. I want this and I will charge it . . .* and this little snowball, this little fox that has got a Mastercard or Visa name on it, ends up devastating the marriage. How many times have you seen on the big screen that a marriage crumbled due to overwhelming debt and pressure? It's not there.

Remember, we said all along in this series our goal in marriage, contrary to what we see in our culture, is not to survive. This isn't a long haul to survive. *I made it 50 years!* That's not it. That's not the goal. The goal is to thrive under the abundant gift of marriage that God has blessed us with.

So what are some possible little foxes? I want to throw out just a few out. One is separate stuff. *This is mine and that is yours.* I know some of you are not going to like this, and you are always welcome to disagree with me, but I think separate bank accounts set you up for a dangerous place. Some married couples have separate bank accounts and say they look at each other's accounts. Some married couples have separate bank accounts and say they don't look at each other's accounts. My question is this: what are you spending your money on that your spouse doesn't have the right to view? Separate stuff. That is just one example.

Another example of little foxes is no time alone, just the two of you. I've been with Lori 13 years, been married for 12, and we've got three kids, and I can tell you it is an incredible reality that we can do life without spending any time alone. We have a great family here that is always willing to watch our kids for us, but we can bounce around going to different meetings or engagements with other people so much that we never have time alone. The little fox begins to get its foot in the door, then one year, two years, twenty years later you realize that you no longer know the person at your side.

Another one is blurry family boundaries. We see the reality of Genesis 2:24 that in marriage, we have become completely selfless as husband and wife. Remember we talked about two verses in Song of Songs about this, and one of them was chapter two, verse 16: "[My beloved is mine and I am his.](#)" That demands an interpretation that nobody else gets your time or your intention before the one you love—nobody else, nothing else, not even that beautiful kid that you have. Priority number one, under the Creator Himself, is "[My beloved is mine and I am his.](#)"

The last fox is absence of biblical leadership. Ephesians chapter five talks about submission, and I know a lot of times our culture reacts to this—submission, submission, submission. But I would argue that if the husband would lead the way the Bible challenges him to lead then submission would *not* be an issue. If he begins to let Christ transform him and he begins to lead by the example Christ has given, I believe that women will look at submission completely differently. *He is loving me in a way that is sacrificial just as Christ was sacrificial. He is leading me like the lion and the lamb.* Fox—absence of biblical leadership. This is one thing that ends up devastating the marriage.

What are the little foxes in your marriage? What are those little tiny things that may have begun, that perhaps you didn't even realize were happening? When Lori and I first got married it was debt. You know how they hand out credit cards like baseball cards on colleges campuses . . . it just happens, and then you've got to do damage control. What are the foxes that have crept into your marriage that you need to begin pursuing? Men, you need to be pursuing these as the biblical leader of your home.

Steadfast love between a husband and wife demands pursuit, protection, and most obviously, permanence. Flip to chapter eight, verse six and seven: "[Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm, for love is strong as death, jealousy is fierce as the grave. Its flashes are flashes of fire, the very flame of the LORD. Many waters cannot quench love, neither can floods drown it. If a man offered for love all the wealth of his house, he would be utterly despised.](#)" He needs to indicate ownership and a maintained security. In those days, they didn't have e-mail or even snail mail. When they sent a letter it was transported by foot or by animal many, many miles away. They wanted to be sure that no one opened the letter, so they would seal it with wax. That way, the recipient could see the unbroken seal and know it had come safely and securely between point A and point B.

"[Set me as a seal.](#)" Set me as your ownership. I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine. "[Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm.](#)" In the Hebrew mind, when they talked about a heart they were talking about desire, the will. "Seal me across your heart" means seal me across your deepest desires. Seal me, who I am, so that your desires are overwhelmed by nothing but me. I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine. "[Seal me on your arm.](#)" Action. It's what we do. Let our hearts, our desires, our minds be sealed, and let our actions also reflect the seal of our love and our covenant as a husband and wife. Steadfast.

Have you ever heard the phrase there's only two things you can count on in life: death and taxes? Let's read this verse again: "[. . . for love is strong as death . . .](#)" The argument here in this biblical text of 3,000 years ago is that in addition to taxes and death, we should be able to count on love. That's the argument. Just as sure as death will come to every single human being from this day forward, so love between a husband and wife should be just as sure. It should be just as

deep of a commitment and as much of a reality as the reality of death. It should be the reality of sustaining, steadfast committed love between a husband and a wife.

What if we were able to grab hold of this steadfast love described in the text—a love that seals our desires, a love that consumes us, and a love that transforms our actions? "Its flashes are flashes of fire." This is communicating with passion. "Its flashes are flashes of fire, the very flame of the LORD. Many waters cannot quench love, neither can floods drown it." Now isn't that the marriage we desire? Isn't that the reason we started this how ever many years ago? We felt a passion that couldn't be quenched by any amount of water.

That is what he is describing in this text. If you begin to love this way, if you begin to pursue this way, you will feel this kind of love. Many waters cannot quench love, neither can floods drown it. "If a man offered for love all the wealth of his house, he would be utterly despised." The wording here is amazing. Even the question of how much money it would be worth is despised. This is saying that even beginning the thought process of asking this question is ridiculous. Isn't that amazing?

"If a man offered for love all the wealth of his house, he would be utterly despised." By offering everything that he has, this love is unstoppable. That is what this is saying. It is a fire that cannot be put out. Unstoppable. Steadfast. Not survival under this covenant or contract of marriage, but thriving under the steadfast love of a fire and a flame that cannot be quenched by any amount of water. It is thriving under the gift of marriage.

Every week I have given you goals to follow, and I hope you have engaged in those along the way. At the beginning of this series, we asked our spouses how we could be a better husband or wife to them. Then last week we took this online love language assessment. Some of you said you had taken one 10 years ago, but it will change throughout your life at different times and different seasons. Last week we also talked about writing a love letter in the same way you did when you first began courting.

This week there are two more goals. I challenge you to sit down with your spouse and identify three to five foxes in your relationship. What are those little things that you may have never talked about before, or maybe you have, but you know they need to be identified? What are the small things that have the power to drive a wedge between you and your spouse? Talk about them.

Second, after you identify them, discuss how you can both protect your marriage. Discuss how you can both do it, but men—step up to the plate and lead! Be the lion. Go out and get rid of the foxes. Be like that imagery on the ancient pottery of men hunting the foxes. Discuss what foxes are within your marriage and then relentlessly pursue removing those foxes.

We started in Romans chapter five with grace, and I want to end by coming back to grace. If you will bow your heads and close your eyes, I want to say again that regardless of what yesterday looked like for you, regardless of what last year looked like, regardless of what every single day of your marriage has looked like so far, today can be a new day. That is the beauty of the cross. At any point in our lives we can see what has been done for us on the cross; that the blood was shed and grace was offered so we can plant our foot and turn the other way.

This is true in life in general regardless of where you are in this whole spiritual walk thing. Regardless of what you know about Jesus or how much church you have attended, it doesn't matter. At any point in life we can begin to be bathed in this grace afforded to us on the cross. Specifically in your marriages today, maybe you know there is a fox that has become a mountain lion; you didn't catch it in time and it has become an incredibly damaging reality between you and your spouse. That same grace that Christ died to give us is offered to you in your marriage as well.

Today we can look forward, identify that issue, plant our foot, confess with our mouth whatever those issues are, repent, turn, and walk the other way under the unmerited and undeserved favor that has been given to us through the cross of Jesus Christ. As I begin to pray I just ask you to embrace that grace. Be willing to turn and walk the other way. Be willing to start anew today. As

we have said from the beginning, this series is not about guilt trips. It's about graceful new beginnings.