

The Crossings, Matt Powell
Engage Your Marriage (Week 7)

Last week we took a journey into Romans, chapter one and we observed that something has happened in our culture—our culture has redefined sex. The media has hijacked sex and redefined it in a way that tells us to forget about God and forget about the Bible, and to allow them instead to define what sex really is. And after looking through Romans we noted that this didn't start just recently but has been going on since the cross.

Last week we also decided to choose the glory of the Creator Himself over creation, and to say no to the culture's definition of sex—a definition that is self-serving, self-pleasuring, marked with infidelity, and tearing away at the beauty of sexual intimacy created by God. Last week was not specifically targeted at married people. Everyone, married or not, lives in and is part of a culture that has redefined sex, and that definition impacts our entire lives. So you can choose to either adopt our culture's definition, or you can choose to honor the Creator's definition.

With that big picture in mind, this week we are going to look at what this specifically means inside of marriage. This is the awkward week in Song of Songs so I saved it for last on purpose. Here is a question for you: why is sexual intimacy so crucial to a biblical marriage? First of all, that question assumes that it is crucial, right? Well in order to answer that question let's take a look at Genesis, chapter one, verse 27, where we will discover that everything is the way it is by intention. Sexual intimacy is from God, it is good, and God is happy with His creation.

Genesis, chapter one, verse 27: "[So God created \[formed\] man in his own image . . .](#)" Let's stop there for a second. God created man, formed man, in His image. The beauty of man is created in the beauty of God. No accidents. "[So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.](#)" God did not think . . . *oh my goodness, what happened? He has got this and she is missing that. What did we do wrong?* No, this was no accident. From the very beginning, from day one, man and woman, husband and wife, were created beautifully, sexually, and blessed by God.

Let's read a few more verses: "And God blessed them. And God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.' And God said, 'Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food. And to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the heavens and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.' And it was so. And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good." Again, no happenstance. God created and He created very good.

We have been talking about Song of Songs, and even in those days sex was completely undefined. In the Old Testament, the majority of the time religion consisted of sexual practices—orgy's, sexual activity. That was how they participated in their spiritual beliefs. So when they got together to worship, sexual activity often took place.

This also took place in the New Testament. There were still those who worshipped and got together at weddings. If you have studied the weddings of the New Testament, specifically the wedding at Cana that Jesus attended, there was probably sexual activity going on at that wedding. When they got together to celebrate, oftentimes it became an orgy. When Jesus died on the cross, sexual activity was probably going on at the foot of the cross because that is how they worshipped their pagan gods. So you can see a complete devastation of God's intention for sex.

But another view shows up in the New Testament. There were stoics who believed in a complete separation between mind and body. The mind and the intellect were good, but the body was bad. Many of the philosophers—the ones you were forced study about in college—said the mind was good but all sexual activity, or anything of the body, was bad. Even some of the church fathers thought that way like Origen, who castrated himself so he would not fall into sexual temptation.

Now let's jump a few hundred years to the Victorian age. Women were not allowed to show their ankles. Have you ever seen pictures of what they wore? It was all the way down. Do you want to know something else pretty strange? It was during this era that tablecloths became long enough to touch the ground because the table legs could cause men to lust. Isn't it crazy how far they ran

the other way? You've probably seen some antique tables with the legs that end in a ball with a claw over them? They needed a tablecloth to cover those because they thought flesh was bad.

Then you wonder why today people have such warped views. Constantly over time our views have been warped by everything worldly. Even today this runs rampant—the internet, books, media—everywhere you go, everything you hear is mis-defining sexual intimacy. Why in the world are we so messed up? The answer is quite obvious when you follow that historical trail through time up to the present day.

But sex is from God and it is very good. Now I will throw in this comment: Because we have come out of that Victorian era and some "traditional mindsets,"—and this predominantly happens with women—people think sex is gross and bad and horrible. They think . . . *moderation. I have to do this only for procreation.* Absolutely not. If you read 1 Corinthians, chapter seven, verses one and two, you will find that both husbands and wives should give themselves completely and sexually to one another. It is not moderation; it is go, go and run. Healthy sexuality. From God and very good. And God tells us how to achieve the things He desires of us. Isn't that cool? He doesn't just give us an idea and then expect us to somehow work it out. What He expects of us He tells us how to do.

I love to watch the Ironman Triathlon when it comes on TV. It doesn't come on very often; sadly it's not popular enough to make TV for whatever reason, but when you watch the race you see them follow different people through this culmination of an event. You see the great, elite athletes setting record times, and then you see the handicapped, which is very inspiring. But what you do not get to see is all that it took them to get to that point.

I have got this video I like to watch called *The Distance*. Most of you would probably find it boring, but it is a documentary on four or five people that shows how they made it to the Ironman event, beginning with day one. You see a stay-at-home mom waking up at crazy hours in the morning to run 18 miles before she starts her day. You see her getting in her swims and doing her four-mile bike rides. Then you see a businessman, the CEO type, who has got a full-time job and how he fits it all in. It makes you appreciate everything it takes to get to that final destination.

We tend to think of sex as an event, but sex is really a process. It is the perfect intersection between physical, emotional, and spiritual intimacy. Do you see that? It is not a physical event, a moment in time, but a process moving forward that culminates in the intersection of physical, emotional and spiritual intimacy.

Let's look at Genesis 2:24. "[Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother . . .](#)" Think for a minute about what that means. When you got married, you left your father and mother, so there was a physical separation. Maybe you lived with them for some years, and then you left them to begin living with somebody else. Then there was also a spiritual separation. If you grew up in a spiritual home, or even if you didn't but were taught some kind of spirituality, you were under your parent's spiritual umbrella. But when you left, you came out from under that umbrella. Then there was an emotional separation. When you were with your parents, if something went down they were the first ones you would call. But when you got married you got out from under that and entered a new setting physically, emotionally, and spiritually.

["Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh."](#) We have a tendency to think that this is just physical, but when you look at the words ahead you see a complete separation from mother and father that is physical, emotional and spiritual—becoming one flesh. Now if that intersection is not there, sexual intimacy is not going to be there either, guys. We run so far ahead and just see the Ironman event and we say . . . *man, we want to be able to complete the race.* But we have no idea what it takes to get there. Sexual intimacy is the result of a process of physical intimacy, emotional intimacy, and spiritual intimacy between you and your spouse. If those things are not coming together, then it is not going to work.

["Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed."](#) I want to give you three ways to dramatically transform the sexual intimacy in your marriage. This is it. This is what you have all been waiting for. Here are three ways to ignite sexual intimacy in your marriage. Number one—pursue your spouse's physical needs. Notice there is no "I" here. Many times when we are talking about sexual intimacy we think . . . *she doesn't do this for me. He doesn't do that for me.* Stop thinking about yourself and pursue your spouse's physical needs.

This could be anything from just serving them, to making special dinners, to helping around the house and doing whatever they need help with. Pursue their physical needs.

Second, pursue your spouse's emotional needs. I hope you already had this conversation because it was one of our goals several weeks ago—to talk through this issue. Pursue your spouse's emotional needs. Many times in marriage, sexual intimacy is lacking because of an emotional deficit in the relationship. Either the husband or the wife is not pursuing the other's emotional needs. Spouses need encouragement amongst other things, and if you are not pursuing that it is because you are consumed with your own needs. Pursue their emotional needs.

Last and most important, pursue your spouse's spiritual needs. Men, that means you cannot expect healthy sexual intimacy in marriage unless you are leading your home spiritually. I am going to pick on the men now because it's easier for me to do that being a man. Men often get frustrated, but they are not leading their homes spiritually. Instead, they see this whole act of sexual intimacy as an Ironman event to be completed. They just want to just show up and have this awesome experience, but they are not pursuing their spouse's needs spiritually.

Ladies, this goes for you as well. Let's look at Ephesians, chapter five. You want to radically transform the sexual intimacy in your home? "[Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands. Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word . . .](#)" If this submission thing isn't happening in your marriage then the sexual intimacy won't either. There is not a dichotomy there. If you are not encouraging your husband to lead, the sexual intimacy is not going to be there. Men, if you are not leading your homes as Christ led the church, sacrificially—if you are not the lion and the lamb, the courageous one that takes a step out and takes risks to lead your home as Christ led the church—then sexual intimacy is not going to be there either. I promise you, if in obedience to God you pursue your spouse's physical, emotional and spiritual needs, you will experience a radical transformation, by the power of God.

Sexual intimacy is the best indicator of an underlying issue. If the sexual intimacy is not there it is the best indicator that either the physical, the emotional or the spiritual is not working. It is the best sign of another disease. So don't get distracted by that smoke screen, that diversion in your marriage. If sexual intimacy is not working, realize you have got a symptom and then run as hard as you can to find out where the disease really is. Which one of you, or both of you, is not pursuing the physical, emotional, or spiritual leading?

Let's look at this incredible chapter in Song of Songs. I think this is one of the only chapters we haven't read all the way through in these seven weeks, and you are about to see why. But before I read it I want to say a few things. The beauty of art, whether music or visual, is that it communicates something that words cannot communicate. That is why we have art. It is expression. Sometimes a painting communicates emotion; it does something in your heart, something inside you, that would never happen if you were reading a paragraph. But if I wanted to force you to feel a certain way or do a certain thing, then I would write it in a paragraph and I would give you bullet points, right? Well Song of Songs is about poetry and not bullet points. Rather it gives us an artistic, beautiful picture of biblical sexual intimacy between a husband and a wife. Follow me on that? This is poetry and this is art and that is the beauty of it.

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."

As I read through these verses, I want you to listen and hear how this is all spiritual. Listen to the combination of the physical and the emotional in this chapter: "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. Come with me from Lebanon, my bride; come with me from Lebanon. Depart from the peak of

Amana, from the peak of Senir and Hermon, from the dens of lions, from the mountains of leopards. You have captivated my heart—hear the emotional language—you have captivated my heart, my sister, my bride; you have captivated my heart 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! Your lips drip nectar, my bride; honey and milk are under your tongue; the fragrance of your garments is like the fragrance of Lebanon. A garden locked is my sister, my bride, a spring locked, a fountain sealed. Your shoots are an orchard of pomegranates with all choicest fruits, henna with nard, nard and saffron, calamus and cinnamon, with all trees of frankincense, myrrh and aloes, with all choice spices—a garden fountain, a well of living water, and flowing streams from Lebanon. Awake, O north wind, and come, O south wind! Blow upon my garden, let its spices flow."

This is her responding: "Let my beloved come to his garden, and eat its choicest fruits." He responds back: "Come to my garden, my sister, my bride, I gathered my myrrh with my spice, I ate my honeycomb with my honey. I drank my wine with my milk." And then the others: "Eat, friends, drink, and be drunk with love!" This is a beautiful picture of biblical sexual intimacy. Nothing is in the way between them. Do you hear that in the language? *I have given everything of me to you—physically and emotionally I am captivated by you. You have captivated my heart my sister my bride, you have captivated my heart with one glance of you eyes.* Physical and emotional spiritually.

This is the intersection, that perfect point of coming together and creating the event of sexual intimacy inside of marriage. It is the culmination of the path traveled, not a fabricated moment in time. The first half is physical—this is the way you look and you are beautiful. The second half is emotional—this is why I love you and this is what you mean to me. All of the language is spiritual.

Look at your worship guide. Why is sexual intimacy so crucial in a biblical marriage? It is the only act of worship created specifically for marriage. Think about that for a minute. This is an act of worship in response to who God is, what He has created and the beauty of what He has given to a married couple brought together in His sovereignty. That is amazing. That is miraculous. That is the work of an Almighty God!

What our culture has defiled is actually an act of worship, created for a husband and a wife to celebrate the God who has brought them together through their obedience in pursuing the physical, emotional and spiritual needs of one another. This is truly the culmination of biblical love between a husband and wife.

It is no accident that this is where our seven-week journey has ended. If we look back at this journey we have taken through Song of Songs, we have seen that love between a husband and wife is specific, which means time, intention and overcoming the obstacles. Selflessness. It's not about me but adoration of them. That is the first step in the journey to get to the biblical celebration of sex inside of marriage.

Second, it is spoken. If we want to get there then we must begin speaking words of encouragement to our spouses. And we looked how to do that emotionally. Remember the love letter that you were challenged to write? If you haven't done that then go back and do it so you can begin to experience the sexual intimacy waiting at the end of this path.

Third, it is steadfast. Be captivated by your spouse. Pursue your spouse. Protect against the foxes. You want to transform sexual intimacy inside your marriage? Identify those foxes we talked about and, men, begin to hunt them down and eradicate them permanently. When you get through traveling this path, then you will arrive at the act of worship God has created to be celebrated inside the covenant of marriage.

That is radically different than the way we look at it. We just look at sex as an isolated moment and try to fix it. Why don't we have this intimacy? Why doesn't it look the way we want? I am telling you we have bought a cultural lie. The reality is spiritual leadership, men, and encouragement, ladies, and pursuing emotional needs, husbands and wives, is it.

So my question is not how is your love sexually? My question is how is your love specific, spoken, and steadfast? When you begin to wrestle with that question as a married couple, then you have earned the right to ask how it is sexually. How is our marriage? How is that act of worship that we have been blessed with to respond to God for His beauty in creation? Because I am striving to lead my home spiritually, because I am striving to be an encourager, then we can begin to say how is this going?

At the very bottom of your worship guide are the marriage goals this week. This is the end of the series and the end of the journey. Every week we have had goals, and if you lost them somewhere along the way then go back and do them. Have a conversation with your spouse about the obstacles to sexual intimacy in your marriage. And don't you dare point a finger. Talking about the obstacles means confessing your own obstacles. Follow me? *I haven't been leading my home* is what you might say. *I haven't been serving your emotional needs. How can I better serve your physical, emotional or spiritual needs?*

Have a conversation with your spouse this week about the obstacles to sexual intimacy in your marriage, and then talk about what you can do to overcome those obstacles. The conversation doesn't get you anywhere until you begin to talk about how to correct those obstacles. Last, review the path that we have traveled about loving specifically, doing whatever it takes to remove the obstacles. If that means turning off the TV, getting off the phone, taking the date nights, taking at least the 15 minutes of face-to-face time with nothing between you and your spouse but the air, then do it. Start talking about it.

I promise if you will commit to this journey, you will begin to see God radically transform your marriage and your home, regardless of whether you have been married one week, one year, or fifty years. It doesn't matter. He is still God and His word is still true.

As I begin to pray and Chris comes, I would like you to begin having a conversation, not with your spouse and not out loud, but with God. I want you to ask God to show you what things you need to pursue, and what things you need to do better in order to achieve a radical transformation of the sexual intimacy inside your marriage.