

The Crossings, Matt Powell
Engage Your Marriage (Week 1)

I've been with my bride, exclusively, for 13 years, and I've been married to her for a little over 12 years. I was blessed to grow up in a home with parents who are now celebrating their 40th anniversary. I don't have a perfect marriage, but I know I'm in love with my wife and I'm pursuing something special, something that God created, and something that God designed. I don't have all the answers, but I know where to find them.

As Christians, we have a tendency to think that we've been given these little snippets about marriage in Ephesians, chapter five. That's it. How do we do marriage? Go to Ephesians, chapter five. What does love mean? Go to I Corinthians 13 because that is read at just about every wedding. And there's nothing wrong with that, but the reality is we have also been given an *entire book* in the Bible of what biblical love looks like. Yet, this book is the most neglected and most misunderstood book, second only to the book of Revelations.

The Song of Solomon—some of you may have grown up around the church and heard a Tommy Nelson series. But if you haven't, and if you don't know who Tommy Nelson is, then you probably haven't been to a church that's gone through the Song of Solomon either. It's a tough book in the Bible. Song of Songs is its real title. In the Hebrew language they don't use superlatives, and for anybody who is not an English teacher, that means there is no good, no better, and no best in the Hebrew language. It doesn't exist. Nothing can be better or best. So what do they do? They repeat things. This is the Song of Songs—this is the greatest of songs that has ever been written. And this is the book we are going to look at today and for the next coming weeks.

Why is it so difficult? Why is it so misunderstood and why is it neglected? Poetry. Written 3,000 years ago. Think how hard it would be to understand poetry written just last week. Now think about trying to understand something that was written in a time and language over 3,000 years ago. It is hard for us to wrap our minds around a book that was written in poetry with a lot of mysteries.

This is week one, so let's set the background for this journey we're heading out on. Why do we need that? The example I like to give is this: Think about when a police officer or detective walks on to a crime scene. They don't immediately say, "The window is broken," and then they make all their conclusions. First they look around and make their observations, they take pictures and they try to see everything that has gone on before they can get a clear picture of what happened. That's where we are. We're going to begin by taking a look around and making some observations.

First of all, there are four big approaches to this book. When you begin to read commentaries you are going to see four interpretations: one is allegory. Some say this book is a fictional account of something that represents a spiritual meaning. That is allegory. Think of *Pilgrim's Progress*. A second approach is typology, which means a picture of some future event. For example, in Matthew 12:40 Jesus said, "[For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.](#)" But now we have the New Testament to define that for us, and nowhere in the New Testament do we see Song of Songs defined as a typology.

Drama is the third approach. It's exactly what you think: a screenplay. Of course the Israelites did not have screens, so it would have been acted out as a drama. But the reality is they did not know of and employ this kind of a means. Song of Songs was probably written somewhere around 922 BC, and drama was not on their radar at that time.

The fourth option, which is the option I believe is correct and the option that we will take in our journey, is called literal historical. Very simply this means real people in a real time talking about a real love. Take it at face value. Isn't that beautiful? Here is one time in life that is not so complicated, but it is still the real deal. This was real people in a real time experiencing a real love.

So who wrote the book and who was it written about? Well, the first line appears to attribute the authorship to Solomon. Solomon was the son of David and Bathsheba, and around 922 BC he was reigning as King over the Israelites. Then after his reign, the kingdom experienced a big

split. This unified nation-country of Israel that came out of Abraham divided into two kingdoms. That is what was happening politically and in the world around the time Solomon wrote this book.

But who was it written about? That is the most difficult question about the book. Some people jump quickly and say it is about Solomon and somebody he loved. But if you read the book of Kings, you discover that Solomon had 700 wives and 300 concubines, so we wouldn't say that Solomon necessarily practiced the biblical portrait of marriage. I think Solomon was very confused. One option that many scholars believe, which is a valid theory, is that this was about Solomon and somebody that he finally fell in love with. But I'm going to give you what I think. I think what we see here is that Solomon liked this girl, but he saw that this Shulamite woman was in love with a shepherd. Solomon couldn't have her, but he was deeply impressed by the real love that he saw between them. That is Matt's theory. If you don't agree with me it doesn't matter, it doesn't take anything away from the validity of this book, but if you read Ecclesiastes, which was probably also written by Solomon, you get the picture that he never really experienced the kind of love that we see in this book.

So the question is how do we approach it? How do we take this book of songs, this book of poetry, and get into it and begin to understand it? Some of you know that I have got one of the most worthless college degrees in the world. I studied music in undergrad. What do you do with that? You don't do anything but teach music, or you do something else. That is the way it goes. But I did take one class called Form and Analysis where we learned how to analyze songs. When you learn how to analyze poetry, it is very similar to music or songs and you begin to look at themes. So when I looked at this book, the greatest songs of any songs, I looked at it and said, "You know, maybe that worthless degree gave me a little bit of insight into how to look at these songs."

This book was not written with any chronology; it was not written to be understood from top to bottom. Instead, it is a group of songs, and you begin to see themes. So we are going to get a little bit outside of our western logical minds for a minute, and rather than going verse by verse, we are going to cover all of the verses and look at the existing themes.

I would suggest that there are four themes that we will see over and over again throughout this book. **These four themes answer the question of what biblical love is between a husband and a wife—it's specific, it's spoken, it's sexual, and it's steadfast.** These four themes are what we're going to see over the next coming weeks, and we're going to examine every nook and cranny of this book, even the most awkward parts of it to understand. Then I am going to show you how all of those areas of this book come together under the blueprint of what biblical love looks like between a husband and a wife. I'll leave with you with this picture before we open up the Song of Songs.

If you are not a baseball fan you should be. It's the great American sport. 1932—the World Series. Anybody know what happened? Yankees and Cubs. Babe Ruth is up to bat. They are playing at Wrigley Field and the Cubs are giving him all kinds of problems; they are just hitting him hard. He gets up there, he is frustrated, he is determined, he is up to bat, he looks around, he looks over to the dugout at the guys hackling him, and he points his finger up to center field. He is pointing and he is saying, "I'm going to knock this out of the park."

Now think about how much guts it would take for this guy, in the middle of the World Series at Wrigley Field, to point to the inner field and say, "Look at me. I am going to hit this ball out of the park." That is guts! Sure enough, about two pitches later he knocked it 440 feet into center field. What an amazing baseball story.

But here is my challenge to you. If you can say with me today, as we begin this seven-week series, "Here is my desire—I have enough guts to say I am going to knock it out of the park, that I am going to do whatever it takes to make this marriage into the marriage that God created it to be, that I want to experience the overwhelming, life-giving encouraging love that God desires for me to have and I am going to take this chance," then I guarantee you that you will get there. If you are willing to do that—to step out in faith and say, "I am on this journey; I am committed to it; I am going to work it out; me and my bride, me and my husband; there are going to be conversations we should have and there are going to be things we should talk about, but I am

committed to it; I'm going to knock it out of the park. Whatever it takes I am there," then God will take that baseball of your marriage far beyond 440 feet in your home.

Let's open up to Song of Songs. On the inside page of your worship guide it says, "Biblical love between a husband and wife is specific." The question is this: How do I love specifically? That is our theme this week. Let me begin reading in Song of Songs, chapter one. "She . . ." I want you to know that these were added later. It is confusing oftentimes when we read this book to really know who is speaking. These "she's" that might be in your bible, or "others," could be a group of lady friends. Guys, you know how it goes . . . the ladies sometimes have their group of friends that like to pitch in on what's going on. That could be what is happening here. That is probably not a 21st century invention of ladies and their friends, and then the "she's" were added later. They are probably accurate, but we don't know for sure. We think that "she" begins here and it says in verse two: "Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth—For your love is better than wine." Not the kind that comes in a box, guys. ". . . For your love is better than wine. Because of the fragrance of your good ointments, your name *is* ointment poured forth; therefore the virgins love you. Draw me away! We will run after you. The king has brought me into his chambers."

The first answer to the question how do we love specifically is time. Time. We see in verse three, "Because of the fragrance of your good ointments, your name *is* ointment poured forth; therefore the virgins love you." In other words, she is saying who you are—your name, your essence, your true inner person—makes your fragrance smell good. The essence of who you are makes you great. Then verse four: "Draw me away! We will run after you." Do you see this biblical love? Time. How do we love specifically? Time. I am in love with the essence of who you are, your name, everything that makes up who you are as my spouse. I love that; therefore, take me with you. Right from the beginning of the book it is about spending time together.

Look at the logic. I'm infatuated with you; therefore, spend time with me. We've bought a lie in our culture—that quality time is *all* that matters and we don't need quantity time. But that equation doesn't work because you can't have quality time unless you have quantity time. It will never work that way. If you are saying in your marriage, "We've got 15 or 30 minutes and we're

going to make this quality time," then you know it doesn't work, does it? You've got to build up quantity time in order to experience quality time.

The average suburban couple in our context probably has 30 to 60 minutes per day of distractionary time with their spouse—30 to 60 minutes per day. Some of you are thinking . . . I've got 15. I'm just saying that by and large, statistically, we have 30 to 60 minutes per day and about 100% of that time is distraction time. What does that mean? Well, you've got 30 to 60 minutes of time at night, maybe after the kids go to bed, and you are both on the couch, laptops out, Facebooking, replying to e-mails. Or, you have got 30 to 60 minutes to get your sports center fixed. Just 30 to 60 minutes, yet we don't give any of it to quality or quantity time in our marriage. How do I love specifically? Time.

Look at chapter one, verse seven. I'm going to keep reading, and I'm going to start in verse five and I'll get down to verse seven. "I am dark, but lovely . . ." this is her speaking, ". . . O daughters of Jerusalem, like the tents of Kedar, like the curtains of Solomon. Do not look upon me, because I am dark, because the sun has tanned me. My mother's sons were angry with me; they made me the keeper of the vineyards, but my own vineyard I have not kept." We're going to come back to those verses. Verse seven: "Tell me, O you whom I love, where you feed your flock . . ." What is she saying? "Tell me how to find you." Ladies, she is pursuing him. Now we'll see both sides of this, but I want you to know it is okay. She's saying, "Tell me where to find you. I will come to where you are because I want desperately to be with you." Go back to verse seven: "Tell me, O you whom I love, where you feed your flock, where you make it rest at noon. For why should I be as one who veils herself by the flocks of your companions?"

She's saying, "I want to spend time with you so much that if you tell me where you are, I'll get there." Now how does he respond to that? Verse eight: "If you do not know . . .," he plays a little hard to get but he gives the answer, ". . . O fairest among women, follow in the footsteps of the flock, and feed your little goats beside the shepherds' tents." He's saying, "Come with me."

Wives, do you desire to spend time with your husbands? They need to hear that from you. I know we men come across like we don't need anything from you, we've got it all figured out, us and our big, tough masculine persona. But here is the reality: we need to hear from you that you

desire to spend time with us. He says, "You want to spend time with me? Here I am; I am right next to the shepherds' tents. You come here and spend time with me." How do you love specifically? Time.

Okay, we are going to flip over to chapter two. Look at chapter two, verse eight: "The voice of my beloved! Behold, he comes leaping upon the mountains, skipping upon the hills. My beloved is like a gazelle or a young stag. Behold, he stands behind our wall; he is looking through the windows, gazing through the lattice."

How do you love specifically? Time. Guys, listen to this—this is a dude's dude, this is a manly man. How do I know? He was a shepherd. He probably killed what he ate, and what he didn't eat he probably wore as clothes. To me, that is the definition of a man. Okay? If you're going to kill it, eat it, and then wear it as clothes that seems to work. So here he is, this dude's dude, this man's man, and how is he described? Leaping, behold, he's leaping over the mountains. He's bounding over the hills. Men, it is more than okay, it is demanded that you desire and pursue your bride, that you spend time with her with enthusiasm. That doesn't mean you are any less of a man. Pursue her, bound to her. What is he doing? He bounds and leaps to where she is, peering through the lattice to see this woman that he is desperately in love with. How do we love specifically? We love through time—giving time, pursuing time. Women, pursue with intention these men that you are married to. Men, with reckless abandon pursue these brides that you have been given.

We used to do that didn't we? Isn't that how it all started? Think back to the beginning for a minute, depending on how old you are. Maybe we used e-mail or instant messenger, or maybe we used Morse Code or Pony Express. It's all the same. You desired to communicate with this person, right? Think about the phone bills. Many of you had long distance phone bills. I remember my dad calling me at some point and the long distance phone bill was over \$400.00.

When I was living in College Station, at that time she was in San Marcus, and we wanted to spend time together so badly that I would drive there to see her, have a class at 7:15, then we would talk until 2 a.m., and then I would drive back to College Station so tired that I would hallucinate along the road. Have you ever been that tired? I would see horses. I know that

sounds crazy but one time while driving on Highway 21, I saw a horse in front of me so real that I hit the brakes. I was that desperate to spend quantity and quality time with the one that I loved.

That is how it started for you, too. E-mail time. Live time. Whatever it was. Guys, life's circumstances may change, but the necessity of spending time together never will. Kids, the work schedule, the career, the pressures from the outside—all of that will change the longer you are married, but the necessity of spending time together will never change.

Number two. How do I love specifically? One is time, and two is intention. In chapter two, verses eight and nine, do you see his laser beam focus? He is leaping and bounding with enthusiasm to the latticework, and he is staring right at her. It is a little freaky, isn't it guys? He's just staring right at her and she sees him. That's intentionality. That is . . . *I love you so much that I will overcome any obstacle to spend time with you.* Let's keep reading chapter two, verses nine and ten. "My beloved is like a gazelle or a young stag." Remember, he is a manly man, but this was written 3,000 years ago. "Behold, he stands behind our wall; He is looking through the windows, gazing through the lattice. My beloved spoke, and said to me: 'Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away.'" He is overcome with intentionality over all of the obstacles that stand in the way and he says, "Here we are. All obstacles removed. Come away with me. I love you, come away with me."

What obstacles in your lives are preventing you from living intentionally so that you can say to your spouse, "Come and spend time with me."? Is it the kids? Do the kids need to go to bed 30 minutes earlier? Do you love your bride enough to figure out a way to help her get the kids to bed 30 minutes earlier? Or do you need to get out of work earlier, DVR the game? Men or women, I know both are sports fans. Whatever it takes, are you willing to pursue and overcome the obstacles that get in the way of you spending intentional time together?

That is what he is doing. He has overcome everything so that he can say in this climactic moment, "Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away. For lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone." This is poetry that is communicating freedom. We've overcome the obstacles and now it is time for us to be together. "Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away. For lo, 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 puts forth her green figs, and the vines with the tender grapes give a good smell. Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away!" "All obstacles are gone. Let's spend time together. I love you so much that I'm intentional enough to pursue you and do whatever it takes to spend time with you." Is that something you are willing to say?

In Genesis 2:24, where this all began, it says to "leave and cleave." Leave your father and mother and cleave together. Or you can translate that word as *stick to* or *adhere*, like an adhesive. You are stuck together and there is nothing that can pull you apart. A pastor friend I used to work with described it like this: If you stick duck tape together, and then try to rip it apart, what happens? You rip apart pieces of this and pieces of that and create a nasty mess. It is because "leave and cleave" means one flesh. Also that word in the Hebrew, and how it is used in other contexts, is like *soldering*. Solder together husband and wife. Let nothing get in the way of you being intentional about one another.

How intentional are you about your spouse? How intentional are you about removing the obstacles that get in the way of time? Without time, all of the other problems will not get fixed. We hear all the time about the importance of communication. You cannot communicate if you do not spend time together. If you are not willing to do whatever it takes to spend time together, then you are not willing to take that first step in order to feel and embrace the awesome gift of love that God has created for you and your spouse.

You see, we tend to focus on divorce statistics in the church. We tend to say, "Here's the scary statistics: do "x," "y," and "z." But that argument focuses on survival as the goal. I think that using divorce statistics as a scare tactic in church is a wrong approach. I think the right way is to say that God has created the covenant of marriage to bring you joy inexpressible, to bring you a partner, an encourager, somebody to journey through life with who makes it better. That is the goal. That is the pursuit. And you can see this beautiful picture in Song of Songs. It is incredible because it is poetry, and there are some things only art can communicate rather than literal didactic words. There are things that art, songs, music and poetry can express that didactic, line-by-line words never will. Have you ever been overwhelmed by a song or a painting? That's the

power of it. That is the beauty of this book—it paints a picture of love and marriage between two people that gives us an idea of what God desires us to have.

I'm sure you have seen this before—a couple who is miserable together, and you think . . . *what are they doing? They're just trying to survive life side by side.* But that is not how marriage was designed to function. It was designed to give us life. It was designed so you husbands would come home from work and spend intentional time with your brides who should rejuvenate you; and they are pursuing you; they want to be with you; therefore, you mean something. That's what God designed marriage to be. Ladies, your husband should come home from work and say, "Hey it's you! I've had a hard day, but seeing your face makes it all okay." You see, that is love. That is marriage. It's not about survival. It's about pursuing and experiencing the greatest joy of doing life alongside somebody else.

I want to tell you that this series we are on is a journey. Song of Songs is not about guilt trips. I'm going to say right now to the ladies and the men—no elbows. When you get home no saying, "You need to know." It is not about guilt trips; it is about grace-filled fresh starts. That is what we are doing here. You see, the beauty of the cross is that Christ died on the cross so that we could have a life. He gave us something called unmerited favor. The Bible calls that grace. That means at any point in our lives we can take this current path, current trajectory, plant, and turn. The Bible calls that repentance. At any point in our lives grace has been given to us, and it enables us to make a fresh start, a new day to stand. Today, February 14, Valentines Day of 2010, we can say, "Here it is. I'm going to knock it out of the park. I'm committed to doing whatever it takes to knock this ball 440 feet, to be able to take this marriage 1,000 feet into where God has created us to be, to experience the love, the partnership, the encouragement that marriage has got to give." That is what we are about here.

I have two challenges for you. The first is to spend fifteen minutes a day of intentional time.

That is all I am asking you to do. How many of you have 15 minutes a day where there is no TV, no internet, no laptops, there is nothing between you and your spouse except for the air that exists between your faces. Ladies, get off the phone and forget about your e-mail. Men, forget about the TV, the sports center, or whatever it is. Just take 15 minutes every day this week with

no distractions—that is time. How do you love specifically this week? Time and intention. We are going to do whatever it takes.

The second is to give one evening this week. Now let me anticipate the objections. We can do whatever it takes to help get the kids in bed. Even those of you with little bitty infants, they will sleep for an hour and a half, maybe two hours. Snack a little bit when the kids eat, then put them in bed, and spend the evening together. Sit at the table with the TV off, eat, and talk. Look at each other. Or if you can pay for a babysitter, get out of the house and go somewhere, but if you can't, I'm saying there's absolutely no excuse for you not to give one evening this week. No excuse whatsoever. Men, pursue her with reckless abandon. Ladies, remember it is okay for you to pursue him. Remember the Shulamite woman . . . "Where are you going to be? I will come to you, and I will make this happen." Ladies, it is okay to be the pursuer inside your marriage.

That is my challenge for you this week. Every week there will be one or two challenges on how we can begin to live and embrace this beautiful biblical portrait of love and marriage that God has created for us to thrive under, not survive under. As we enter this time of prayer and response, again I want to remind you this is not about guilt trips—it is about grace-filled fresh starts.