

MARRIAGE IS A MINISTRY SERIES

Craig Caster



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in the Marriage Is a Ministry series.

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Unique Needs

Marriage Is a Ministry Series Volume 3

Craig Caster

Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. (Matthew 28:19–20)

FAMILY DISCIPLESHIP MINISTRIES

Phone: (619) 590-1901

Email: info@FDM.world

Websites: www.FDM.world, www.discipleshipworkbooks.com

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Preface

God created the institution we call marriage, and today it is under severe attack. That statement might sound strange to you, but the most significant adverse effects originate from within the relationship between husband and wife. After a couple marries, each partner begins to tug according to their own needs and desires. As time passes, problems go unsolved, and disappointment, frustration, and anger bring hurt, which results in resentment and revenge. When two people enter into matrimony with such hopes, such good intentions, why do so many marriages fail? Alternatively, why are so many couples settling for unfulfilling relationships?

This book is dedicated to God and to His desire for every couple to experience the blessings He intended in a marriage. When two people unite as husband and wife with no training in God's principles, and often no godly examples from their pasts, they are genuinely ignorant of how to tend to each other. They may bring past hurts and emotional voids that add to the challenge. Through this material God will reveal nonnegotiable truths that must be followed, or the result will be discouragement and disenchantment. In short, much pain.

Statistics indicate that too many marriages between Christians end in divorce. As God's children and heirs of all His promises, why are believers failing? The problem is lack of information, lack of discipleship in biblical principles. Sadly, the church is not currently putting enough effort into this area to turn the tide that is sweeping so many down the path of destruction. Married couples are in great need of biblical teaching, being discipled by others in God's truth. When believers learn what God desires and decide to follow Him as disciples of Christ, they will receive the grace and power to overcome any problem.

God wants to show Himself strong on our behalf and wants us to glorify Him in our marriages. But we must want it too. We know marriage is important to God, yet most Christians after ten years of marriage still feel inadequate to disciple others. Consider a person who had performed a job for ten years. They would likely feel very confident to train someone else. And God is much more concerned about how we tend to our spouses than our vocations.

As you prayerfully complete this series, God will reveal His purpose for you as husband and wife. All information is based exclusively on biblical truth. The workbooks will guide you with Scripture and give you practical illustrations to help you implement the principles you are learning. The series is also intended to be a tool to disciple others. When your eyes become opened by the incredible way God is changing your life, you will see that many others need help too.

Lord God, thank You for revealing Your heart and will to us in Your Word. Please bless those who go through this book. Make the principles clear. Give them humble hearts to forgive those who have hurt them and the desire to ask for forgiveness from those they have hurt. God, be glorified in and through the marriages of those who are willing to follow You. Amen.

Introduction

This workbook is designed to bring you onto the path of discipleship, which means walking in God's principles. When we use words like *walk*, we hope you understand that living under these principles is just as fundamental as learning to walk.

The goals of our workbook are:

1. to show you that God provides principles for marriage,
2. to equip you with tools and applications for applying these principles, and
3. to guide your marriage and family into the forgiveness, healing, and unity that comes through obedience to God.

Family Discipleship Ministries exists to help educate the body of Christ in vital areas. Failure to disciple others is directly related to the failure rate in marriages today. And how do we know this? By what we have seen, experienced, and found in proven statistics today.

The Process

The study is divided into five volumes. Start with volume 1 and continue through each volume in order. Skipping to a volume or section that sparks your interest is tempting but not advised, because each volume and lesson build upon one another. For example, you may want to master the man's or woman's companionship needs, but there are biblical principles that must be learned before you can properly tend to your spouse's needs in a godly way. Work toward completing one lesson each day for five days. Building daily study with consistency is key to spiritual success.

These principles have been tried and proven successful. I have experienced it in my own marriage and through the lives of countless people in counseling and marriage classes. Please understand, this is *not* a "Five Easy Steps to Marriage" manual. Biblical discipleship is challenging work and requires you to surrender to God's will as you change some of your attitudes and behaviors. The process will require commitment, sacrifice, and humility.

Starting Each Day

- View each daily study as time spent with your God, and expect Him to speak to you through His Word.
- Start each day with prayer, asking God to reveal where you need to change and to empower you to apply what you are learning.
- Have a reflective mindset. Do not rush through the material just to say you finished it. Give God time to speak to you, and meditate on what you learn.

Things to Note

- This study is a new priority and will require dedicated time. The lessons are to be done daily. If you miss a day, *do not skip it*, but work to complete all lessons in order.

- Scripture clearly states that marriage is important to God. If you are struggling to complete the lessons, pray about your priorities and other commitments. Enlist the help of an accountability partner for prayer if necessary.
- Remember, your spouse is an essential partner in this effort. Study together or separately, but always discuss what you have learned and prayerfully commit to implement any changes needed.
- Lessons may vary in the amount of information presented. After you complete each one, look ahead to the next lesson to plan your time with God and get the most out of it.
- Space is provided for answering questions and recording your thoughts and prayers. If you have downloaded and printed this workbook, we suggest you put it in a three-ring binder and include additional paper for personal journaling and notes.

DIG DEEPER

This section marks an opportunity to read Scripture and relate it to the subject being presented. You will become more familiar with the Bible, biblical principles of marriage, and what God expects from you as a spouse.

Self-Examination

As you study biblical principles, this section provides time for self-examination, finding areas where personal improvement is needed. Space is provided for listing insights, confessions, and prayers for strength and wisdom to make those changes. One aspect of the discipleship process is personal accountability. If God reveals that you have sinned against your spouse or children, confess your sin to them and ask for forgiveness. Practice this regularly even if it is not noted to do so.

FACT FILE

Boxes like this one provide definitions of words or phrases from the Bible. We have taken great care to use well-known, theologically sound Bible dictionaries and commentaries for clarity, referenced when possible. Many of these definitions appear in *Appendix R: Glossary*.

ACTION PLAN

After you study the biblical principles, this section challenges you to take action and apply what you have learned in your marriage. To be true disciples we must understand that God not only desires that we grow in knowledge, but He also requires that we live it out.

Appendix Resources

Please take advantage of the appendices at the end of the workbook. They are there for your growth, and we refer to them throughout the workbook. Before you begin this wonderful journey, please fill out *Appendix A: Commitment Letter* (volume 1).

Leader's Guide

A leader's guide is available at FDM.world under Free Ministry Downloads. All materials on our website focus on discipleship and are provided free of charge.

Lesson 1

Biblical Companionship Needs

Each volume in this marriage series builds on previous volumes, and this one is no exception. Be sure to study each one *in order* to have a firm grasp on the previous concepts before you dig into this material.

We begin this study with the companionship needs of a man, or husband, and then move on to find out what a woman needs. We should already be familiar with the word *ministry* and how it applies to our marriages. Remember, we are to be ministers in our homes, ministering to our spouses as Christ did and does minister to us. The God-given responsibility of meeting each other's companionship needs is a ministry meant to communicate love and glorify God.

As you learn to apply God's truth to your life, a transformation will take place in your thoughts and behavior. This is the miracle of being obedient to God's Word, which is not always easy, but always yields the fruit of righteousness. This obedience *must* precede transformation. You will find yourselves meeting each other's deepest needs, which is deeply fulfilling. And when we refer to God's Word, believe with all your heart that this is the only basis for building and maintaining your strong foundation—a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. It is the only place where we can receive God's blessing and power to enable us to fulfill His will and purpose.

We have already learned about a companionship need common to both husband and wife, our greatest need, which is love. Keep 1 Corinthians 13 and all the points describing the way God wants us to love each other fresh in your mind. Refer to this passage often as you seek to build unconditional love between you and your spouse.

Note to husbands: As the leader of your home, and with the responsibility of loving your wife as Christ loves the church, learn 1 Corinthians 13 thoroughly. You are representing God and His truth to your wife and children.

Companionship Needs Are God-Given

Husbands and wives have companionship needs that are unique to each, as male and female. These needs are universal, placed within us by God, and the Bible is the only proper source of information on ministering to each other for the purpose of fulfilling them. We begin our study in Ephesians 5:22–23 with needs that are specific to men. Why men first? Simply because Scripture teaches in that order, with instruction to women on how to meet a man's companionship needs.

As we study this material, consider that God created the union of marriage and, in doing so, had and still does have a plan and purpose for men and women in marriage. Contrary to common perspective, marriage does not exist to fulfill our selfish expectations and desires. For example, couples in counseling usually begin with a list of what they are not getting out of the relationship and why that makes them very unhappy. Most of us start out with no concept of what it means to love each other God's way. Marriage is a good thing, created by God for our benefit and pleasure, but this only happens as we commit ourselves to fulfilling His will and purposes.

Most people are ignorant of this foundational truth: God is the author and designer of marriage. Do you know that one of the main purposes of your marriage is to bring glory to God? Misunderstandings about the purpose of marriage and the definition of real love are often the source of great discontentment and disappointment, the reason many are not experiencing the fullness of blessing that God designed for this relationship. Most of these problems result from having a selfish perspective. We must do this God's way, or we certainly will be unfulfilled, no exceptions.

DIG DEEPER

Through your relationship to Christ, the Great Shepherd, God can do a work in you. What is that work, and what are the goals?

Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.
(Hebrews 13:20-21)

In John 17:17, Jesus prays this for His disciples, "Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth." To *sanctify* means "to make holy and separate from sin," resulting in a life devoted to God. This Scripture shows the importance of God's Word in accomplishing anything according to His will, or as a standard for evaluating what is right and wrong, which includes how we behave within our marriages.

Self-Examination 1

As we've learned, success comes from having a strong foundation, an abiding relationship with Jesus through time in God's Word and prayer. This is the only way to know God's will and receive the power and grace to succeed in our ministry of marriage. At this time, how would you describe your devotional life? If it has not been consistent, confess to God and set a plan to get it right.

People are here on earth to fulfill God's will, even though some reject Him and some receive His gift of salvation in Christ. And so it is even among believers. We can choose to follow God's instructions or be disobedient. However, if we understand that the path to joy and blessing comes only from Him, then does it not make sense that in all areas of our life we need to be

looking to the Lord, “What is it You want me to do?” And we will not be doing His will in our own strength. God promises to provide the power to accomplish whatever that is. Second Peter 1:4 says there “have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.” No matter how foolish or selfish you have been in your past, God can and will overcome it all. When the Bible says something and we do not believe it, we are calling God a liar.

As husband and wife, God has a plan and purpose for each of you. He has called you to Himself, to bless you with His promises, and when you look to Him, to His Word, He will guide and provide you with power. The same almighty power that raised Jesus from the dead is at your disposal to accomplish everything God asks of you.

And what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places.
(Ephesians 1:19–20)

Even Christian couples come into counseling feeling hopeless, filled with resentment. They do not realize that they have slipped into self-pity, which is denying the power of God. God does not cheat his own children. He has provided all for their success “as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue” (2 Peter 1:3). The problem lies with us. A selfish or ignorant outlook never glorifies God and never produces victory.

Christians are shocked to learn that the divorce rate among believers since 1997 has equaled that of those couples outside the faith. We must gain the confidence that God can and will provide us with the knowledge and power to succeed in marriage. God wants to be glorified in His children. He created the union of marriage to bring glory to Himself. If God created marriage as a blessing for His children and to glorify Him, what has gone wrong?

Companionship Defined

Within a marriage, two people unite as companions. This suggests the meaning and potential pleasure of being in such a union with another person. The shocking truth, lost to so many, is that our success does not come from within us. True fulfillment only comes from knowing and following God’s specific information on how to meet each other’s companionship needs, which is only found in His Word.

FACT FILE

Companion—One who has accompanied, or is in company, with another; a spouse, an associate, an interest of some special relationship as a spouse, or comrade.

Self-Examination 2

Describe your current reflections on the above statements. Be honest.

God created marriage, which is the key to finding and unlocking the mystery of love. As the Bible is the source of God's written truth, we look to it for what we seek, which is an understanding of the purpose of marriage and how to meet each other's deepest needs. When researching doctrine on a certain subject, it is important to start at the beginning, which is Genesis, the first book of the Old Testament. After man had been created by God and received the breath of life (Genesis 2:7), He was placed in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it (verse 15). God observed and soon decided that Adam, as He had named his man, did not have a companion, a helper comparable to him, and this was not good in His eyes. God saw all else as good (Genesis 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25), but Adam *alone* was not good.

God could have created Adam and Eve at the same time, but He wanted Adam to acknowledge the need for a companion, resulting in greater blessing and appreciation for the woman. Proverbs 18:22 says, "He who finds a wife finds a good thing, and obtains favor from the Lord."

And the Lord God said, "It is not good that a man should be alone. I will make him a helper comparable to him." (Genesis 2:18)

One author wrote concerning this passage in Genesis:

God's provision of a wife for Adam is a concrete example of God's knowing what is good for man. Companionship replaced isolation. For companionship to be satisfying, however, there must be oneness in the marriage (Genesis 1:26-27; 2:18). Self-centered living destroys oneness and companionship.²

FACT FILE

Helper—Ezer (Hebrew). To aid or assistance that is given; indicates persons who give help: the woman created as Adam's complementary helper (Genesis 2:18, 20); refers to the Lord as Israel's help (Hosea 13:9) and as Israel's chief Helper (Exodus 18:4; Deuteronomy 33:7; Psalms 33:20; 115:9-11).¹

Comparable—One suitable, corresponding to him, a companion.

Both husbands and wives need to embrace God's pattern and the importance of meeting each other's companionship needs. This is God's first step in the creation of marriage. If God is your creator, does He know you? And does He know what is best for you?

It is foolish to look within ourselves to discover what we want and need to achieve contentment. We are naturally self-motivated, and most of our information has come from worldly sources that are opposite to God's Word. We must look to the Bible as our source. God is our creator and He alone can be trusted to explain to us our unique companionship needs and how to meet them.

God Defines Our Needs

As we learned from Genesis, men and women are designed as companions, but each has a distinctly different role in the marriage relationship. Only God can tell us what He designed us to give and receive as husbands or wives. He knows what we need.

And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches and glory by Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:19)

Your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him. (Matthew 6:8)

God knows our needs and provides for them, but He also has given us the right to choose for or against His will. In light of His promises, does it make sense to reject God's plan and fail to bless and be blessed within our marriages?

The Bible says "God is love" (1 John 4:16), and more specifically this means that God loves you. God loves you so much that He wants your spouse to become the companion you need. God loves your spouse so much that He want you to be the one they need. God is ready, willing, and able to transform you into the companion He designed you to be.

God can guide the wife into being the companion He wants her to be for her husband, to suit his unique personality and needs. The only one who can mess that up is her, not him. And the same goes for the husband. God created each one and put those unique companionship needs in them.

God says, "I love your spouse so much, and I want to pour My grace into you, transform you into the man (or woman) and the husband (or wife) I want you to be, to fulfill your spouse's companionship needs." And the only one who can mess that up is you. Do you believe that? If not, what are you choosing to believe?

We must be constantly challenged and checked in these spiritual points because many philosophies and negative, demonic forces come against the truth, which God has defined plainly. We can lapse into doubt and fear as we look at our failures from a worldly viewpoint, which is not what God has designed for us.

Trust in the Lord with all your heart,
And lean not on your own understanding;
In all your ways acknowledge Him,
And He shall direct your paths. (Proverbs 3:5-6)

This is a promise from almighty God. As we look to His Word for direction, we approach it with humility, admitting that God knows our natural bent toward sin and selfishness, but He loves us still. It is normal to be skeptical, so let's acknowledge that God's ways are not our ways and affirm that He alone provides the truth we need for life.

"For My thoughts are not your thoughts,
Nor are your ways My ways," says the Lord.
"For as the heavens are higher than the earth,
So are My ways higher than your ways,
And My thoughts than your thoughts." (Isaiah 55:8-9)

This Scripture should bring great conviction. We cannot trust our own ways and what we think or feel about our marriage relationship or what is best for our spouse. It is like God is standing on one side of the Grand Canyon and you on the other side. His thoughts and your thoughts so far

apart. There is a division between God and man's understanding of marriage. Therefore it is so important to get God's wisdom. We should also admit that our hearts are sinful, and we need God to cleanse us.

The heart is deceitful above all things,
And desperately wicked;
Who can know it?
I, the Lord, search the heart,
I test the mind,
Even to give every man according to his ways,
According to the fruit of his doings. (Jeremiah 17:9–10)

This means we cannot say, "Okay, honey, this is what I want you to do for me, and then I'll be happy." That how we deceive ourselves. A couple came to counseling, and the wife had a long list of expectations for her husband. She thought she would be happy if he did all those things.

That well-meaning lady didn't understand the perspective of God's Word. Our happiness does not come from our spouses. We have been deceived if we believe that and will never find happiness and fulfillment this way. The only way to find it is by surrendering to God and doing God's will for our spouses. That is the way God designed marriage.

This wife's problem was ignorance of God's will for the marriage relationship. But God does not want us to be ignorant. He has given us all the information we need in His Word. Thankfully she chose to receive God's correction.

Many men make the same mistake. They place selfish expectations upon their wives, which left unmet result in them acting grumpy, pouting, becoming isolated and angry, or overcommitting themselves to activities outside the home.

Men, you are going to learn what your unique companionship needs are, how God placed these needs within you, and how your wife is to fulfill those needs. You will also learn how to work together, not measuring your wife's performance, but being patient, forgiving, and encouraging. Remember that you also are responsible for meeting *her* unique needs. Sound like a challenge—some real work? It is. But this is what we call a "win-win" situation.

Self-Examination 3

List the expectations you have placed on your spouse. Take it before the Lord, confess any bad behavior, and write a prayer of commitment to change. Think of proper, godly ways to let your spouse know what you would like to change.

DIG DEEPER

Jesus says “if,” and He uses Himself as an example. In these Scriptures, identify what He is asking you to do and what the result will be in your life.

If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father’s commandments and abide in His love.

“These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full.” (John 15:10–11)

Until now you have asked nothing in My name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full. (John 16:24)

Many couples, even after being together twenty years or more, are still living according to their own understanding, Christians included. Wondering why they feel empty, resigned, or miserable, their marriages bear no resemblance to God’s design. Along the way, many have split by following the common deception that they can find what makes them happy somewhere else, just taking their unsuccessful ideas with them. They may stay in a new relationship out of determination, be too tired to try again, or launch on a path of destruction by “playing the field.”

The New Living Translation of Jeremiah 17:9 says the heart is “deceitful ... and desperately wicked” (NLT). You can’t go out looking for what you want and find real happiness. It’s an empty search. Husbands and wives, we must look to God. He created us and designed us to be in relationship. He is faithful and all-powerful, and He is not a liar.

Christians beware, because even the church has become infected by worldly psychology, sometimes peddling worldly teaching and philosophy about marriage. Even “Christian” counselors give guidance that’s not based on Scripture. When the church stops using God’s written word as their manual, the consequence will be failure in the lives of their people.

What does God’s Word say about worldly philosophies?

Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ. (Colossians 2:8)

The Bible Knowledge Commentary makes some excellent observations concerning this text in Colossians:

The particular false philosophy at Colosse was “hollow” (*kenēs*, “empty”), “deceptive,” and based on human tradition . . . rather than on Christ. True Christian philosophy “take[s] captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ” (2 Cor. 10:5). Philosophy is the love of wisdom, but if one loves wisdom that is not Christ (the Sum of all wisdom, Col. 2:3), he loves an empty idol. Such a one will be “always learning but never able to acknowledge the truth” (2 Tim. 3:7). This kind of philosophy is based on the world’s basic principles (*stoicheia*, “elementary principles” or “elemental spirits” [RSV]; cf. Col. 2:20; Gal. 4:3, 9). This may refer to the evil spirits who inspire such heresy and over whom Christ triumphed (cf. 2 Cor. 4:3–4; Eph. 6:11–12). Such a philosophy is demonic and worldly, not godly or Christlike. Unless believers are careful, such philosophy may ensnare them, taking them “captive.”³

How do you feel in your marriage? Empty, discouraged, hopeless? Write your thoughts.

There are generally two reasons for failure. Either you know what God’s Word says and you have decided to disobey it, or you are ignorant of God’s Word and therefore are missing out on His blessings. Many problems arise because Christians do not know what the Bible says about marriage. The Enemy and the world can easily sway those who have a weak foundation and are lacking knowledge. That is why discipleship is so important.

We should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting. (Ephesians 4:14)

When the wind of man’s doctrine or teaching comes along, we had better know what the Bible says. We must no longer be children, but adults, in our understanding of God’s Word concerning marriage.

Lesson 2

Men's Needs

Our study is based entirely on Scripture. In Ephesians 5:21–33, we find clear teaching on our unique companionship needs as husbands and wives. And as we begin, let us remember that success only comes by way of obedience, by responding to the voice of the Holy Spirit, whom Jesus sent to dwell within us, to teach and guide us into all truth.

And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit.
(Ephesians 5:18)

One noted Christian author writes of the Holy Spirit:

Be filled with the Spirit. Thus a believer, rather than controlling himself, is controlled by the Holy Spirit . . . and Christ is the Content of the filling (Colossians 3:15). Thus in this relationship, as a believer is yielded to the Lord and controlled by Him, he increasingly manifests the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22–23).⁴

Here again we see the principle, “as a believer is yielded to the Lord,” being a condition of our success. He is our strong foundation, and it is through His power that we gain the ability to manifest the fruit of the Spirit and accomplish God’s will.

Submitting to One Another

In Ephesians 5:21, God says, “Submitting to one another in the fear of God.” Why does God want us to grasp this first? Because He knows we battle against selfishness, competitiveness, and a desire to dominate each other. And this is not a dude thing, right? Women do it too. The curse on Eve, after she ate the apple, was to struggle with a desire to usurp the God-given authority of her husband (Genesis 3:16).

After man and woman disobeyed God by exercising free will to eat of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, they would suffer the consequences of their rebellion. The curses resulting from the fall are recorded in Genesis 3:16–19.

To the woman He said:

“I will greatly multiply your sorrow and your conception;
In pain you shall bring forth children;
Your desire shall be for your husband,
And he shall rule over you.” (Genesis 3:16)

The word *desire* in Genesis 3:16, also in Genesis 4:7, means a desire to dominate. The man has been given authority over his wife, yet she would thereafter struggle to submit and even have a carnal desire to *not* yield to her husband’s leadership.

Every Believer

For women who struggle to submit, naturally wanting to dominate their husbands and usurp authority, God can and will give you the grace and power to yield to His will. Ephesians simply says, “Submitting to one another in the fear of God.” That verse is “declaring unequivocally that every spirit-filled Christian is to be humble and submissive. This is foundational to our relationships; no believer is inherently superior to any other believer. In our standing before God, we are equal in every way (Galatians 3:28).”⁵ This verse makes it clear that God values us equally. A man or woman is no more or less important than the other. This also gives us the foundation “in the fear of God” for our desire and commitment to give to each other and meet each other’s companionship needs as unto the Lord.

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom,
And the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding. (Proverbs 9:10)

We must realize our spouse’s needs are as important to God as our own. Imagine the voice of God saying, “Before I show you your own unique companionship needs, I want you to realize that you are responsible for meeting your spouse’s needs.” In God’s eyes, our responsibility is to meet the needs of another. This is love—God’s way.

Ephesians 5:21 presents each of us with a challenge to submit to another person in obedience to God. This indicates a willingness to perform the loving deeds that God has called us to as husband and wife, yielding to His will regardless of how we *feel*. God is not only using us to sharpen and bless our spouses spiritually, but He will use our obedience to transform us into the image of His Son, Jesus Christ, which is His will for every believer.

This is the definition of being a disciple: our greatest desire is to follow Christ as God transforms us into His image. You may be a Christian, but a disciple is determined to be obedient to what God puts before them to do.

Many people in counseling do not have the desire to do God’s will. They don’t do their homework or follow clear direction. But there is no magic wand. God won’t do by miracle what He’s called you to do by obedience. Until you surrender and say, “Okay, God, I really want to examine myself, to see if I am fulfilling Your will, and I desire to obey,” your marriage will never change.

Mutual cooperation is best, but we must always keep our eyes on God, not our spouses. You are responsible only for your own obedience, not your spouse’s. It is not unusual for one spouse to be more dedicated to change than the other. Many times one spouse has determined to obey God, which has resulted in the other eventually changing for the better. It takes somebody to make that decision. The motivation to fulfill our duties should be to please Him, not ourselves.

DIG DEEPER

How is the relationship between Jesus and the Father like ours? What did Jesus do to attain such a relationship, and how can that apply to your life?

And He who sent Me is with Me. The Father has not left Me alone, for I always do those things that please Him. (John 8:29)

What should be the motivation for obedience in your relationship to God? How can you relate this to your marriage and your attitude toward your spouse? If possible, pick a specific area of challenge and decide how to better please God with your behavior.

Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him. (2 Corinthians 5:9)

Finally then, brethren, we urge and exhort in the Lord Jesus that you should abound more and more, just as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God. (1 Thessalonians 4:1)

By faith Enoch was taken away so that he did not see death, “and was not found, because God had taken him”; for before he was taken he had this testimony, that he pleased God. (Hebrews 11:5)

A warning along the way: If you lapse into looking for a return on your investment of obedience and service to your spouse, then you are becoming selfishly motivated and will experience what we call the three Ds: Discouraged, Depressed, and Despondent. Do you recognize any of these feelings? Then get back to obedience, expecting your reward from God. God is not a liar. He will bless you as an obedient disciple apart from your husband’s or wife’s behavior.

Self-Examination 1

If God has used this information to reveal any selfish expectations or sinful responses toward your spouse, confess it below and ask God to help you stop.

Man's Companionship Needs

Let's look further at Ephesians 5 to learn about the unique companionship needs God has placed within the husband. God designed marriage such that the wife is the one to pour into her husband all the encouragement and support that is necessary to meet his inborn companionship needs. Men do not invent these needs. They are placed in them by God. This is why there are Scriptures warning that when we refuse to meet the needs of a spouse, we open our marriages to trouble and temptation.

Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything... and let the wife see that she respects her husband. (Ephesians 5:22–24, 33)

Do you see any words in these passages of Scripture that make many women today cringe?

Notice that this passage doesn't simply say "submit," but it adds "as to the Lord." And then it specifies, "just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything." Submit to their husbands in how many things? Ladies, in *everything*. Not just some things, but everything. The Scripture also commands wives to respect their husbands, which means to treat him with high regard.

FACT FILE

Submit—Hupotasso (Greek). A voluntary attitude of giving in, cooperating, assuming responsibility, and carrying a burden.

Self-Examination 2

Ladies, check yourselves to see how you are reacting to this. Are you thinking he does not deserve it, only deserves it at times, or that you will become a doormat and somehow this doesn't seem fair? ___ Yes ___ No

If yes, confess and ask God for faith to trust Him. Identify your concerns and ask for an obedient heart and specific wisdom to heal your unbelief.

Wives, God put these needs in your husband. He did not make a mistake. It may feel like sometimes God asks to do things that seem impossible or unfair. But remember, we live in a society that questions whether life is fair and often rejects God's Word as especially unjust and unfair. We can bring this mindset into our marriages, believing our situation is unfair when it is really God's will. The change that is really needed is our commitment to trust and obey Him. Life will seem unfair if we focus on ourselves and look within ourselves to decide what we need for fulfillment. Apart from God's perspective, we will always feel cheated because the flesh can never be satisfied. When we keep His commandments, we abide in His love and have joy.

If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love.

These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full. (John 15:10–11)

God is the creator-designer, and He alone writes the instruction manual. Your husband does not understand why he has these specific needs and why he feels unfulfilled when his wife is not treating him properly. Most men are not able to articulate their needs. After reading this, they will be able to define them. And, men, when you do get clarity, you need to be able to lovingly tell your wife what is missing.

Ladies, fair and unfair is not the standard for our obedience, but we obey God out of a heart of faith and love toward Him. You may be insecure about submitting yourself to this man in your life, but you are submitting to the Lord. When you do that, God will honor your faithful obedience.

Let's set aside the word *happy* for now. Many saints have obeyed God and been very unhappy at times. When we read about Jesus's life, certainly His immediate happiness was not the goal of His actions. And this same principle is obvious in the lives of the disciples, especially in the life of the apostle Paul. The Bible says Paul was stoned, left for dead (Acts 14:19), and went right back to ministering for the Lord. In 2 Corinthians 11:23–30, Paul listed his suffering and disasters without any complaining.

That's hard to understand. Our culture looks upon suffering in a negative and demeaning way. But this is not the life of a believer as described in Scripture. We grow better and stronger as we suffer for Christ. The Bible says that when we are weak, His grace is sufficient for us because His strength is made perfect in our weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9–10). As disciples of Jesus Christ, we are not to let the world's opinion and their practices dictate what we believe and what we do.

DIG DEEPER

Identify what these Scriptures say about trials and suffering and what they produce in our lives. This is a general principle for both husbands and wives.

And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope.
(Romans 5:3–4)

My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing. (James 1:2–4)

In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ. (1 Peter 1:6–7)

Before I was afflicted I went astray,
But now I keep Your word.
You are good, and do good;
Teach me Your statutes. (Psalm 119:67–68)

It is good for me that I have been afflicted,
That I may learn Your statutes.
The law of Your mouth is better to me
Than thousands of coins of gold and silver. (Psalm 119:71–72)

I know, O Lord, that Your judgments are right,
And that in faithfulness You have afflicted me.
Let, I pray, Your merciful kindness be for my comfort,
According to Your word to Your servant. (Psalm 119:75–76)

ACTION PLAN 1

Ask God for the faith to trust Him in times of suffering. Tell Him how you feel, tell Him about your fears, and talk to Him honestly and openly. In the Psalms, David poured his heart out to God, and God especially loved David because of this humility.

Obstacles

Specific obstacles may keep a woman from wanting to submit to her husband. Men may have made selfish and ignorant choices that have hurt daughters, wives, and women, like sexual abuse, rape, violence, abandonment, disrespect, and cruelty. A woman may have experienced one or more of these from fathers, brothers, uncles, neighbors, or boyfriends.

If you have experienced any of this and are struggling to trust your husband's role to protect you or be supportive of his leadership as a father, this information may cause you panic or fear. Perhaps you cannot even imagine being able or wanting to be the wife God is calling you to be. Maybe your father misrepresented God and hurt you, your mom, brothers, or sisters, and that has deeply affected your heart toward men. Maybe you feel like you married a man who doesn't know what he's doing. Your heart may be hurting, and you think, *I'll be darned if I'm going to submit to this fool*. You may be identifying with old hurts, struggling with hostility and self-protection instead of trusting God, being vulnerable, and affirming your husband's leadership.

Do you find yourself lashing out in anger or insults when your husband tries to lead? You may think he's trying to control you. This is a common emotion if you have never dealt with your past hurts. Take a moment to pray, "God, do I need to seek healing through forgiveness because I am struggling to trust You and yield to my husband's leadership? Lord, I am not sure I can even trust You with this." This is not always a disobedience issue, but often it's due to a past that has not been dealt with biblically.

If this hits home for you right now, you must go back over your past. Find out where you need to seek healing and who you need to forgive. The only alternative is to live in a sinful state of bitterness and inability to trust, which will infect everyone around you.

Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord: looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled.
(Hebrews 12:14–15)

The hurts that others have caused us can become strongholds and chains that hinder our Christian walk until we heal by forgiving them. You must apply the antidote of forgiveness to your past. Go to *Appendix P: Trust and Forgiveness* and follow the principles laid out for you. God's plan for a wife is that she first put her trust in Him. This means yielding to His plan for fulfilling her husband's companionship needs. It is not our traditions, cultural norms, ethnic traits, past hurts, or even the way our parents lived that are to guide us. It must be God's Word.

ACTION PLAN 2

Write a prayerful commitment to go through the material on forgiveness and reconciliation, if needed. Follow through on every point where action is required. A bitter woman will, without intention, tear down her own house.

Please note: If you are currently struggling in an abusive relationship, you must seek help. It is important to know that neither God nor we condone abuse in any form. If physical or verbal abuse is present, seek appropriate help. Intervention and counseling are recommended.

Lesson 3

Beware of Worldly Influence

Have you been letting your thinking and behavior fall under the influence of the worldly philosophies? If so, that might have infected your marriage. Many people in counseling say, “Well, in my culture (meaning ethnic background), this is the way we do it.” Or “As a _____ (fill in your ethnic background), the woman has no say in the home, or the woman does all the training of the children.” But as Christians, we must put our cultural beliefs aside, because they are in direct conflict with the Word of God. Many times, cultural beliefs are preferences with no moral implications, and it is totally fine to practice them. However, when a cultural belief is contrary to the Bible, it becomes a moral conflict, which is sin. We must *always* check our beliefs about marriage and family with God’s Word.

Cultural Influences

Our culture, or the philosophies and principles of this world, is all around us. The wisdom of the world comes via the media (books, TV, movies, magazines, and internet, just to name a few) or often through education and peer pressure. Any of these can influence us to view marriage and family through the lens of the world. Beliefs and philosophies can get so ingrained that we believe it’s the truth, the way to operate in marriage, until we compare it to the Word of God.

Religious Traditions

Many religious teachings about marriage and parenting have become traditions. Instead, let’s be like the Christians in Berea, who after hearing the teaching of Paul, “searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so” (Acts 17:11). Do not blindly take anyone else’s word on truth, not even from this workbook, but open the Word and verify that it is true. Jesus had to deal with religious leaders who preferred to live their lives according to the traditions that dominated the religious culture in which they were raised. By stubbornly refusing to give up those ideas taught to them by men, they eventually rejected the Savior who came to save them.

Traditions of Men

Traditions are beliefs and behaviors that are passed down from one person to another, one generation to another. Parents give children bad marriage advice using their own lives as the standard. But Christians must make tough decisions when it comes to following Christ. When the Word of God is our standard, we must always honor God and His Word above all others, including our parents. We have past philosophies, current psychologists, and numerous authors published on the topic of marriage. Some have become the main current of thought on marriage and parenting. Men like Sigmund Freud are still considered a viable source of information. Many of these people were not even personally successful, never attaining fulfillment themselves. Never follow advice not substantiated by God’s Word. Jesus gave a sound warning on this topic.

All too well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition ... making the word of God of no effect through your tradition which you have handed down. And many such things you do. (Mark 7:9, 13)

God had given the Jews instructions for living, but their religious leaders had altered, twisted, and added to His words until they were subjecting the people to man-made rules or principles, not truth. By doing this, they made God's Word of no effect. In this context, the Pharisees were saying that they could not take care of their parents financially because the money was "corban," a sacrificial gift to God. In reality, they were justifying greed, saving the money for their own purposes.

This shows how deceitful our hearts can be, that we may spiritualize, or put our own twist on Scripture to suit our own purposes. Jesus said, "In vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men" (Mark 7:7). No word or deed goes unnoticed by the Lord.

Biblical Traditions

There are traditions to which we should hold tightly. Paul told the church at Thessalonica, "Therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or our epistle" (2 Thessalonians 2:15). Paul was saying stand firm and hold onto the biblical truths that had been given to them by the apostles through their preaching and letters. We must all hold tightly to the truth.

We cannot let any other relationship cause us to compromise the truth in Christ, no matter how it may look to others. And as Christians, we will sometimes be considered strange when we follow biblical principles that are contrary to the world's viewpoint.

In regard to these, they think it strange that you do not run with them in the same flood of dissipation, speaking evil of you. (1 Peter 4:4)

We should look strange, because we are strangers, aliens to the world, and God's Word now dictates and governs everything we do.

At that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. (Ephesians 2:12)

Self-Examination 1

Are you in any way following culture or religious traditions that do not agree with the Word of God? Is it affecting your marriage? Discuss this as husband and wife. Write what you learned from each section above.

Jesus's Perspective on Family

Jesus warned against putting the ideas or influence of anyone before God's when He said, "If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple" (Luke 14:26).

Jesus is not saying that to love Him you must hate your spouse, children, and other family members. Rather, if it comes to a choice of doing something God's way or our parents' way, or the world's or our own way, we must choose God's way. The word translated in this verse as *hate* actually means "love less." Our love for God, His Word, and what He desires is to be greater than any other commitment. Obeying Christ at all costs is the nature of a true disciple. In Christ's day, Jews who chose to follow Christ, to publicly identify as His disciples, were shunned and punished. This is still happening all over the world today to those who choose Christ.

If we disobey God and choose to love Him less, there are consequences. First, peace disappears, then joy, then contentment, and eventually the spiritual fruit. The fruit of the Spirit, which is love, will not be flowing from you, but the fruit of your flesh. How good is *that* fruit? It's rotten flesh. The Bible says that all our pretend righteousness is as filthy rags to God.

But we are all like an unclean thing,
And all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags;
We all fade as a leaf,
And our iniquities, like the wind,
Have taken us away. (Isaiah 64:6)

Nothing good comes out of us—not one good thing. And when we find ourselves in this situation, when we are miserable and depressed and we have all this junk spewing out of us, what do we naturally do as humans? We blame others for our bad attitudes and bad behavior, as if our reaction is normal and justified under such horrible pressure.

Husbands and wives both do it. Look at Adam and Eve. God entered the garden after they ate the forbidden fruit and asked, "Adam, what happened?" What were the first words out of Adam's mouth? "It's the woman You gave me." He tried to blame God—and his wife. It is our sin nature.

Husbands and wives typically blame the other person for their misery. People in sin, doing it their own way according to their own understanding and not knowing or following God's instruction, are miserable. If you let your eyes be filled with your spouse's failures, you will never see clearly. You must see your own sin, repent, and follow God in obedience.

God tells us over and over, “Trust my way, not leaning on your own understanding. Peace and joy come from Me.” Not your husband, not your wife, and not from within you. You are in sin when you are doing it your own way, and you will be miserable because He loves you too much to let you be happy. God says He disciplines every one of His children because of His perfect love for us (Hebrews 12:5–6).

The first sign of discipline is loss of peace, joy, and contentment. Depression follows. And then the fruit of our flesh really begins to bloom. Rather than continuing to blame, the only solution is to seek God and be willing to examine ourselves. We must stop examining our spouse’s fruit and look at our own.

Self-Examination 2

If you have been focused on or blaming your spouse for your unhappiness, write a prayerful confession to God, asking Him to reveal your sin and change you.

With the laying aside of other philosophies and getting rid of the blame game, we are ready to dig into what God has to say. The companionship needs of a husband are logically couched within God’s instructions for a wife. God tells all wives: Submit as unto the Lord, that your husband is head. Be subject to your husband in everything. Respect and honor your husband. What does all that mean for daily life?

The Work of Submission: Affirming Your Husband

Do you feel that your husband does not know how to lead, and the past is full of his mistakes? It is understandable, from a human perspective, that you would have doubts about submitting to this man, really trusting God to put yourself under his authority. The Bible describes how this looks, the nature of a submissive woman.

Wives, likewise, be submissive to your own husbands, that even if some do not obey the Word, they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives, when they observe your chaste conduct accompanied by fear. Do not let your adornment be merely outward—arranging the hair, wearing gold, or putting on fine apparel—rather let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God. For in this manner, in former times, the holy women who trusted in God also adorned themselves, being submissive to their own husbands, as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, whose daughters you are if you do good and are not afraid with any terror. (1 Peter 3:1–6)

Notice these verses are directed to women with husbands who are not obeying the Word. There are no specifics about the disobedience, but instruction to the wife is quite specific—continue to be submissive. This verse covers a wife’s potential to influence an unbelieving husband toward fellowship with the Lord (“may be won”). A wife’s power is in her conduct and attitude, not words (“without a word”). Put your trust in God, surrender to His will as a wife, and He will do the work.

Many couples have one unbelieving spouse or one who is disobedient to the Word, which is not easy. God promises blessing, but He does not promise an easy road. We sometimes miss the verses that speak of self-denial, the cross, and denying one’s life in order to follow Jesus (Matthew 16:24–25).

When your husband makes a foolish choice or bad decision, and you disagree, believe that God disagrees (“even if some do not obey the word” from 1 Peter 3:1). The natural tendency, since the curse, is to debate and argue until you win him to your perspective. The Bible says to win a husband over “without a word” (verse 1). It is one thing to say, “Honey, here is another way to look at it, but I will follow your leadership and your decision.” But it’s totally different to debate or manipulate with bitter anger, defensive threats, and non-affirming behavior like sarcasm, criticism, pouting, and rejection. A Christian wife is to be praying for her husband to be a godly leader or to be saved, trusting that God is looking at her as His daughter and caring for her.

Wives, God’s goal is that your husband “may be won.” In the context of 1 Peter 3:1–6, He is revealing His design so that the husband “may” be won. Notice this is not a promise, but a pathway on which God can work through you to bring your husband to Himself. Also notice there is no time limit on following His plan. Countless marriages on the verge of divorce, papers already filed, have totally turned around when husband and wife follow God’s plan. Husbands have been saved, believers have been inspired to learn and grow spiritually, and restoration for the entire family has happened. God is so good!

Wives, be encouraged. God’s plan is that husbands “may be won by the conduct of their wives, when they observe your chaste conduct” (1 Peter 3:1–2). *To observe* means “to look upon, to behold and contemplate.”⁶ Reviewing what we have learned, God created woman to be the helpmate, and a husband will know (by observing, contemplating, and looking upon his wife’s conduct) whether she is supporting him. Chaste conduct means abstaining from all behaviors toward your husband that are contrary to God’s will. One writer says that a wife may have “things in her conduct and temper which would mar the beauty of her piety, and prevent any happy influence on the mind of her husband.”⁷ A wife has great influence on her husband, either leading him toward God, or away.

How does a wife accomplish this obedience? It starts in the heart. First Peter 3:3 speaks of a woman’s natural concern for her hair, jewelry, and apparel (today we would add makeup), which is okay in the proper perspective. The late J. Vernon McGee, noted pastor, said, “If the barn needs painting, paint it.” But God, in verse 4, defines real beauty and feminine character as, “rather let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God.” God wants us to renew our minds (Ephesians 4:23) and strengthen the inner person (Ephesians 3:16), for out of our hearts spring the issues of life (Proverbs 4:23) and our actions (Matthew 15:18–19).

Wives, describe what “very precious in the sight of God” means from 1 Peter 3:4.

Know that God is watching. When a wife behaves properly, it is “very precious” in God’s sight (1 Peter 3:4). God wants a woman to know that if her heart is gentle (meek, mild, and forbearing), if she has a quiet spirit (tranquil, undisturbed), and if she is willing to submit, that it is of great value to Him. God created woman for a specific relationship to man, and when she takes the role of wife/helpmate, and is willing to submit to His perfect plan, God is blessed by her heart and desire to glorify Him.

When we speak of glorifying God, this does not mean the boastful or egotistical desire of a controlling deity. It is to reveal a God who is love, to show that He only has our good in His thoughts at all times and is waiting to bless His creatures by knowing them more intimately as time passes.

Lesson 4

An Affirming Wife

Women, you must guard your hearts. You are bombarded with magazines, so-called Christian books, TV programs, radio stations, counselors, and misguided churches, who all suggest that you deprioritize your husband. Many sitcoms make men out to be blabbering, self-centered, selfish idiots, but this image is a poison from the pit of hell that is infecting our culture. Yet we call it entertainment. Most of our programming on TV is Satan's church. If you are watching these sitcoms, turn them off and never return.

Who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them. (Romans 1:32)

God wants you to use the powerful influence He has given you as a wife to help your husband believe that God has anointed him as a leader. Believe that God will give him all he needs to grow and learn how to do it right. You are to look for ways to affirm him. Do not treat your husband with less importance than the kids, the house, the animals, your career, or any other interests in your life. Many men feel like number six or seven on their wife's priority list, but tending to your husband should be your *second* priority (Ephesians 6:22). You cannot alter God's perfect plan and *not* expect Him to bring discipline. Nor can we expect blessing for disobedience.

If your husband feels undervalued, he may react in a negative way. And if you are treating him poorly, where is the blessing and pleasure of having a loving companion?

Historically, there has been much confusion on what God really means by male headship, or leadership. Every culture faces the challenge of understanding and following God's true intentions in Scripture. Remember that it is only when we twist and make His truth follow our own desires that it becomes perverted. Pastor Skip Heitzig, in a message titled "Homemaker or Home Breaker," gave some historical background on the family in times of the first century church, showing how cultural influences can creep into our lives.

In the ancient world, two thousand years ago in the Roman and Greek, or "Greco-Roman culture," there were two extremes in the family. On one hand, you had male chauvinism. On the other hand, you had Pagan feminism. Both were strong forces. Okay, by and large, men two thousand years ago were autocratic. Roman men could be tyrants because there was actually a law that was written for the Roman man called the "Patria Potestas," or the absolute rule of the husband/father, meaning he was in complete charge of the lives and the affairs of his family.

This seems impossible to us, that people could justify living like this. But we need to realize that anything can happen when we are ignoring God and His Word. Pastor D. L. Moody, a renowned preacher now with the Lord, shared an experience showing what can happen when we truly follow God's instruction.

Moody was approached by a lady after church who said, "You know, pastor, my husband is not a believer. He drinks, he cusses, and I've done everything you could imagine to get him to church, and he won't come. I've done everything." She went on and on, all the things she's tried to do, 99 percent ungodly.

So Moody directed her to 1 Peter and said, "I want you to go home and do this."

The next morning, she arose early instead of staying in bed, cooked him breakfast, and made him a great lunch. This went on for several weeks, and then she started preparing fish for dinner, which she hated, but he loved. This continued, and one day she said to her husband, "Honey, the church is holding special meetings on Wednesday nights for the next couple of weeks. Can I go?"

Her husband looked at her and said, "You're asking me? When have you ever asked permission to go to church?"

"Well, it's the middle of the week, and I just wanted to ask you," she replied.

A week passed, and her husband came home from work, showered, and dressed in his good clothes.

"What are you doing?" she said.

"I'm going out," he said.

"What do you mean you're going out?" she said with suspicion.

"Any man who can get my wife to change this much is worth hearing!" he replied.

She had tried everything in her own way, but when she followed God's Word, her husband changed. We need our wives to affirm us, *not* remind us of our failures. We need to know they believe, not just in us, but in the power of God to change us into the husbands He desires us to be.

Wives, if your conduct and attitude does not reflect this, then not only are you not fulfilling your husband's companionship need as a man, you are also rebelling against God. Are you using your tongue and your actions to condemn your husband or to bless and affirm? The Bible says the goodness of God is what leads us to repentance.

It is important to mention here that neither God nor we condone abuse in any form. If physical or verbal abuse is present, seek appropriate help. Intervention or counseling is recommended.

However, many women say, "I just can't take the abuse. No matter what I tell him to do, he just won't listen to me. He will not do it." Please note that it is not abuse when he won't do what you want him to do. Trials like this are not abuse.

God uses other people, especially your spouse, to challenge and perfect you, to reveal your own sinfulness. God uses difficult situations in your marriage to change you and give you the opportunity to look at yourself, not blame your spouse for a bad attitude. Until you take

ownership of it, until you ask God to forgive you and apologize to your spouse, you are not going to change.

Is This Information Outdated?

Some say we are in the twenty-first century and things have changed, so we need to update the Bible to fit our times. The Bible has proven itself to be the source of truth in every century and culture, including ours. It *never* becomes outdated.

To illustrate that the concept that a husband's leadership and a wife's submission do not change over time, let's look at 1 Peter 3:1–7. When Peter wrote this letter, it was about AD 64, more than two thousand years ago. He encouraged wives to be submissive to their husbands (verses 1–4), and then he used the story of Abraham and Sarah to illustrate his point: "For in this manner, in former times, the holy women who trusted in God also adorned themselves, being submissive to their own husbands, as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, whose daughters you are if you do good and are not afraid with any terror" (1 Peter 3:5–6).

Abraham and Sarah lived about two thousand years before this was written, and Adam and Eve lived two thousand years before that. Let's follow the timeline from creation: God designed Adam to lead and Eve to help. Two thousand years after that, Abraham and Sarah followed the same pattern. Another two thousand years later, Peter directed New Testament believers to follow the same pattern. Those four thousand years did not change how God designed marriage to work. If God were going to change the management style, He would have done it in the New Testament. And since the Word of God is complete, and we are not to add to it or take away from it (Deuteronomy 4:2; 12:32; Proverbs 30:6; Revelation 22:18), then we need to embrace it.

You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you.
(Deuteronomy 4:2)

Do not add to His words,
Lest He rebuke you, and you be found a liar. (Proverbs 30:6)

We must not forget that we all are born with a sin nature that wants to follow Satan, the world, or the flesh. If we are not watchful, we can wind up polluting God's management style with philosophies that are contrary to Scripture. We must weigh every thought and action against His precious Word. Pleading ignorance will not stop the negative consequences from happening.

A Successful Woman's Comment

If you remember the TV series *Full House*, DJ was played by Candace Cameron (now Bure) whose brother, Kirk Cameron, starred in *Growing Pains*. She is still acting and is also successful as a wife and mother. Candace met her husband, Val Bure (a Russian hockey player), at a charity hockey game, and not long after they were married and had children. After being married ten years, here is what she had to say about marriage and God's management style.

Like any marriage, we've had our happy days and our growing pains (no pun intended), but it wasn't until nearly a decade into our marriage that I really began

to understand the impact that my role as a wife could have in this union. With some changes of my own, I was excited to discover that an already good relationship could be transformed into a great one.

The first step I took was understanding that although marriage is an equal relationship where husband and wife are equally important, we aren't designed to share the same roles.

Holding the Bible, I read, "For the man is not of the woman: but the woman of the man. Neither was the man created for the woman; but the woman for the man" (1 Corinthians 11:8–9 KJV).

Today's society had me believe that there should be no differences between a man and a woman. Society had it wrong. Val and I were created equally but differently, and so we have differing responsibilities in our marriage—mine being his helpmate. God created Adam, and when he saw that Adam was alone, he created Eve to be his helper.

Was this an important lesson in reshaping me? Very much so . . . If we can learn to yield to the authority God has placed in our lives, in turn we learn that our flesh must yield to our Spirit.⁸

Self-Examination

Identify what the Lord has revealed to you about how you need to change in the area of submission. Then write a prayer asking God to help you change.

What Is Affirmation?

Affirmation is a man's foremost companionship need. Ephesians explains how submission is the foundation for affirmation and how it communicates affirmation to a husband.

Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything. . . . Let the wife see that she respects her husband.
(Ephesians 5:22-24, 33)

This biblical principle of affirmation may seem old-fashioned and frightening due to the attitudes of our current culture, who might see this as a call to servitude. The basis of God's principles is our attitude. Scripture says, "Out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks" (Matthew 12:34). Submission is an attitude of the heart, which should be one of continual affirmation toward your husband shown by the ways you prioritize him, treat him, and speak to him.

Men did not ask for this affirmation. God designed it for every man to receive from his wife. He created your husband with this void that can only be filled by you. This can only be successful when you yield to Him. Trust God with this truth. He calls your husband to fulfill a role of leadership in the family, and whoever God calls will receive the power to succeed. It doesn't matter if he is not perfect or if he has failed. God anoints and ordains us to our roles and purposes here on earth, and He will equip us. When we refuse to trust God, we are in rebellion.

FACT FILE

Affirm—To confirm, assert as valid, assert positively.

Are you looking at your husband's performance as the condition for your respect? When has God ever looked at us like that? Is that the basis on which you want God to evaluate you, the condition for His love? If you are choosing to look at your husband with carnal eyes, not through the eyes of God, then this is sin and will lead to failure and misery. God's work is a process, for you and your husband, and God says your affirming respect and confidence are essential. A husband needs the affirming, loving, and godly support of his wife. The Bible gives us a strong warning about choosing to live for our flesh, in rebellion.

For the mind-set of the flesh is death, but the mind-set of the Spirit is life and peace. For the mind-set of the flesh is hostile to God because it does not submit itself to God's law, for it is unable to do so. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.
(Romans 8:6–8 HCSB)

Proper Leadership

Husbands, you must desire to learn how to lead, no matter how hard it seems or how impossible it may have been in the past. Dedicate time to learn how to do it God's way. You must believe that your wife is a gift from God, to assist and encourage you to become a godly leader. If her attitude is not there yet, do not let that deter you from gently and lovingly stepping up as head of the family. Live in faith that God can and will provide your wife with the desire and power to learn how to cooperate. If you demonstrate humility before God and acknowledge that He is your leader, it will boost your wife's confidence in you.

Many men did not have a father that modeled proper leadership. And the churches are not teaching couples how to function in these roles. Men need to be disciplined in this area as it is one of the most important tasks given to us in this earthly life. If we have not been taught or if we have been taught by wrong information and wrong examples, we are set up to do it wrong and will suffer the consequences.

Since so few men were taught godly leadership by their fathers, we need other men to come alongside us and invest time to help us apply what we are learning. This is called *discipleship*, and we know it works because Jesus used this process. This may sound frightening, even foreign, for someone else to know our private matters. But God calls believers to encourage, support, edify and invest in one another.

Men, in this study you are learning how to tend to your wife and family as a husband and leader. As you work these principles into your marriage, God is also going to bring men into your life who need to be disciplined in the things you have learned. Be in prayer over this.

DIG DEEPER

Can you see how these Scriptures apply to discipling others? Men, this includes your wife and children. Describe what God is asking you to do, and apply it to your family.

Therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing.
(1 Thessalonians 5:11)

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another. (Colossians 3:16)

Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. (Galatians 6:2)

Perhaps you have made major mistakes and think you are so far away from what God has called you to do. But that's okay. The great thing about God is, no matter what has happened or when you start, you can change. Make a commitment to learn. Make a commitment to be the husband or wife He called you to be. You will be blessed when you do it His way.

Husbands, we are not inherently worth the love and priority that God tells our wives to give to us. But our loving heavenly Father put this void in us, called our wives, and created them to fulfill it in us. And when they choose to do it, God gives them the grace and ability to do so. Praise Jesus!

He who finds a wife finds a good thing,
And obtains favor from the Lord. (Proverbs 18:22)

Some men receive great favor from God through their wives. But there are wives who bring up past mistakes and point out each time their man blows it.

An endless dripping on a rainy day
And a nagging wife are alike. (Proverbs 27:15 HCSB)

Ladies, *nagging* means being contentious, and a contentious wife is unwilling to trust the Lord and obey Him. It is the opposite of affirming, and this attitude will not accomplish God's will in your life. What a man needs is a wife who believes that God has called him to lead and that God will

provide all that is needed to do it. And remember, gals and guys, it is a process. As we go through God's process with love and patience, we get to show each other how we can grow and change. This is a faith-builder and encourages us as we see God at work in our lives.

DIG DEEPER

Write a prayer after each Scripture asking God to fulfill what is being said, first in your life and then your spouse's.

But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and forever. Amen. (2 Peter 3:18)

We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is fitting, because your faith grows exceedingly, and the love of every one of you all abounds toward each other. (2 Thessalonians 1:3)

Lesson 5

Common Non-Affirming Practices

We have discussed being affirming, but what does it look like when a wife is *not* affirming to her husband? We know *affirming* means to confirm your acceptance and faith in him by showing respect in your actions and conversations, and by submitting to his decisions when necessary. Let's look at some differences between being affirming and letting it all go.

Is This Edifying?

Ladies, do you complain to friends or relatives about your husband's failures? Your husband may not hear what you are saying, but the Lord does. Don't try to spiritualize it by saying, "Well, she's my close friend and my prayer partner." You could say, "My husband and I need some prayer," rather than explaining his faults. Complaining about your husband is disobeying God, and there will be consequences. Nothing is done in secret (Hebrews 4:13).

DIG DEEPER

Identify what these Scriptures command us to do concerning our speech.

Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers. (Ephesians 4:29)

There is one who speaks like the piercings of a sword,
But the tongue of the wise promotes health. (Proverbs 12:18)

A wholesome tongue is a tree of life,
But perverseness in it breaks the spirit. (Proverbs 15:4)

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart
Be acceptable in Your sight,
O Lord, my strength and my Redeemer. (Psalm 19:14)

He who guards his mouth preserves his life,
But he who opens wide his lips shall have destruction. (Proverbs 13:3)

Being Supportive

When a wife corrects her husband in front of other people, including the children, it is non-affirming and not showing the unity of support. If you disagree on a parenting situation, discuss it in private. You should not correct your husband in front of the kids unless you want to oppose God and His plan. Ladies, if you are doing this, you are not experiencing the joy and peace God wants you to have because it's non-affirming to your husband. Yes, he needs your advice, but consider your words carefully. Likewise, men, our wives are a gift from God because they complete us, and that means we should consider what they say.

Encouraging your husband to change in a parenting situation might mean taking your husband aside and asking why he was yelling at your son. Then graciously reminding him that screaming doesn't help and suggesting an appropriate discipline instead. He needs your encouraging influence. You have insights into the souls of your kids that he doesn't have. It's a gift. Use it rightly in accordance with God's ways. The decision is yours. A supportive wife will have an attitude in line with this Scripture.

Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. (Matthew 18:15)

It's about discretion, keeping whatever happened private and handling it without anyone else's involvement. That is love, and we are to be "speaking the truth in love" (Ephesians 4:15).

Who's the Maintenance Man?

Wives, it is not respectful or affirming to a husband to be treated like the maintenance man or household servant. Running the household is a team effort, especially if you have able-bodied children. When your husband walks in from work, do you have a list of things for him to do?

If you have able-bodied children living at home, assigning chores to them is not only helpful, it also teaches them responsibility and self-control—important qualities for an adult. It is common for moms to believe they are more concerned for their children's happiness, while dad often checks out in this area. When children are asked to do something, and they make excuses, whine, or complain, they need a strong hand. Do not disregard discipline, or the influence of a father in these times. Women are nurturing, sometimes to a fault, and when they see an overflowing trash can in the kitchen, instead of asking their twelve-year-old son to take care of it, they wait until

dad comes home and ask him to do it. Women need to guard their hearts in this area and prayerfully ask God to help them prioritize their husband's authority and needs.

Is This Showing Respect?

Cooperate with your husband in setting rules and disciplining the children. This is a way to affirm him. But do not undermine his word or his authority with the children. Do you discredit him in front of the children or behind his back? If your husband issues discipline (whether you like it or not), don't undermine him by saying, "Oh, you know your dad; he'll forget in a couple of days," and just let your child slide on the discipline. That is not being affirming, nor is it being a helper. The kids will start manipulating you and putting one parent against the other.

Most parents have *not* been disciplined in parenting. Please see the Parenting Is a Ministry series at FDM.world to get a full explanation of rules, consequences, chores, and how to carry out godly discipline. It is designed for all ages and family styles.

Ladies, do you realize that you will lose respect for your husband if he does not lovingly correct you when you are not affirming him? You may feel angry, but you need to stop if he says to you, "I heard what you said. You don't need to repeat yourself" or "I don't need you to tell me how to drive a car." Saying anything further is non-affirming communication. Choose to affirm him and learn from each situation. Most men are surprisingly willing to work with a reasonable suggestion, minus the attitude.

Choosing to Suffer or Serve?

Problems arise when a wife, out of ignorance, stubbornness, or pride, is unwilling to serve her husband. If this is you, do you think others will see you as weak? Or is it a fairness game? *Well, I work too, so why should I have to serve him? Why should I pick up his plate? He needs to pick up his own plate! And why should I give him food? He can get food! He's got two legs.* Many women have been affected by the satanic philosophy of equality, which means not serving your husband in anything he can do for himself.

Whenever we refuse to serve others, we are not representing Christ, and our relationships will suffer. This does not mean a wife should be treated as a subservient possession. A wife is God's daughter, a gift from Him, and is to be treated as a precious gift.

Self-Examination

Are you looking for ways to serve your husband, whether at home or in public? ___ Yes ___ No

Identify four ways you can serve your husband, and bring them before the Lord daily in prayer. Ask Him for ideas if you are unsure.

DIG DEEPER

Paul and his companions ministered to people continuously. What was their motive, and what was their attitude toward serving others?

But we were gentle among you, just as a nursing mother cherishes her own children. So, affectionately longing for you, we were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God, but also our own lives, because you had become dear to us. (1 Thessalonians 2:7-8)

God has given you the gift of being a helper to your husband. How should you use your gift, and why?

As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. (1 Peter 4:10)

Are Finances a Deal-Breaker?

There are going to be times that you do not agree on finances. Wives, if you disagree with the allocation of funds, make a humble request or politely offer your perspective, and then leave it with the Lord in prayer for your husband. Even if your husband is violating scriptural instruction in this area, reprove his ways tactfully, appealing to his spiritual nature. To *leave it* excludes bitterness, resentment, complaints, ignoring, and all such behavior.

Money is the number one cause of divorce, but God does not allow for divorcing due to financial problems. Too many times wives will argue and debate after they have given their point of view, which is saying, "I don't trust you." Maybe he has earned that mistrust, but remember God is at work. God transforms us through difficult circumstances, and this qualifies. If the situation involves dishonesty, addiction, or lack of responsibility to the family, this is the occasion to get professional or pastoral input.

Is Your Love a Battlefield?

There are many struggles over companionship needs in the area of sex. A wife who is unwilling to work on the physical relationship, which may require adapting to her husband's needs, is inviting trouble. Sex is one of the most significant ways that men are affirmed. A wife who communicates

any of the following is in sin: *If I feel you have performed as a good husband and father, maybe I will give you a treat. You don't deserve this, but I need to do it. Okay, but let's get it done.* These are all obviously negative and humiliating examples of a non-affirming attitude.

Pornography has become a common addiction for men. Is it wrong and sinful? Yes. But your husband will be more vulnerable if you deny him within the marriage. God designed men to receive essential affirmation and fulfillment when being intimate with their wives. Yes, porn is a wrong substitute—it destroys what God wants. But a wife who holds out on her husband for personal reasons is also wrong. When you voluntarily surrender yourself physically, you are blessing your man by affirming him in a most important way.

Men, let us be patient. God, in His perfect plan, knows all the seasons of life a woman goes through. They have monthly hormone cycles, babies, weight gain, body changes, female problems, and even menopause. God has a sense of humor. It is so important for us as husbands to be patient. All too often husbands become discouraged, quit trying, and settle into a pattern with their physical relationship that is far from what God wants. There is a temptation to consider pleasuring oneself as acceptable because of the unfulfilling marital relationship. After ten to fifteen years of marriage, many couples have a terrible physical relationship. Far from what God created it to be.

Ladies, on a scale of 1 to 10, how important is physical intimacy to your man? Perhaps a 12? God made him this way. How important would your husband say it is to you? Although a few wives may be near 10, most men would say a 2, 3, or 4. Yet God made women that way. God has a sense of humor. These differences serve some purpose: to learn the meaning of sacrifice, denying ourselves, and working together to fulfill each other's needs.

When couples go to counseling because the husband has been caught looking at pornography, the wife is furious, and the husband is embarrassed. They often explain that they're having sex once every three months, and it's been like that for many years. She knows how often he would like to have sex, but she is blaming him for his sinful choice yet not willing to take any responsibility herself.

What he did was wrong—*sinful*—but is it understandable because he looked to his wife for years and was rejected 98 percent of the time? Her actions communicate an unwillingness to affirm him and tell him that his need is selfish. Pornography is wrong and absolutely not justified, but Christians are afraid to talk about sex and get help when they are struggling. God designed us for sex, and it is 100 percent for married people.

Many couples are not experiencing the fullness of God that is available. Sex is good, and it meets both physical and emotional needs built into us as humans. It is a companionship need for *both* husband and wife. First Corinthians 7:4 teaches that our bodies are not our own—we belong to each other. We must consider each other's needs and desires.

Do not deprive one another sexually—except when you agree for a time, to devote yourselves to prayer. (1 Corinthians 7:5 HCSB)

Husbands, if you have grown stale or turned to sin out of frustration or tried to revive your marriage with perverted requests aimed at your wife, repent and pray, “God, clean my heart.” You need to get it out of your mind. It is wrong, it is sinful, and God will give you the grace to be freed from it.

Talk to your spouse about your physical relationship. Discuss what is comfortable and pleasurable for both of you. Be willing to hear from each other and adapt your expectations. This is loving your spouse.

See volume 4, *Physical Fulfillment*, for an extensive look at this topic.

Now go to God in prayer:

Father, I thank and praise You for the Word, for what it reveals to us. Thank You for giving us Your Holy Spirit, the power that enables us to do all things that You desire. Father, where there has been division, where there has been selfishness, where we have been disobedient to Your Word, I pray that You would speak to our hearts and change us. Remind us of what we have learned. Give us a desire to study, to pursue holiness, to surrender to Your will, to change those things that are not glorifying You. Lord, we thank You for the gift of marriage and pray that we would glorify You with obedience in every aspect of our relationship. We ask these things in Jesus's name. Amen.

For Further Application

To help you apply the principles you have learned, complete *Appendix H: Husband's Needs* and *Appendix L: Companionship Needs*.

If you need help to determine the strongholds that are holding you back from God's best for your marriage, complete *Appendix M: Common Stumbling Blocks*.

Lesson 6

Women's Needs

We now turn to the companionship needs of a wife, which can only be met by her loving husband. Men, you must remember that our goal is to understand and obey God's will, not our own or the world's. There is much confusion about how to meet a wife's companionship needs. The media has plagued us with unbiblical, ungodly advice, and many have embraced it. Approach this subject with an open heart, wanting to hear what God has to say.

Our calling is to be ministers to our spouses, and our motive for doing this is to glorify God. As you move forward, transformation must take place in your thinking and actions. Conforming to God's Word is not easy, so it is essential that you maintain a strong foundation—your relationship with Christ. When we are abiding and obeying Christ, His blessings and power enable us to fulfill His will and purposes.

God's Word is complete, and it is clear in Ephesians 5 that a husband is just as responsible for meeting his wife's needs as she is for meeting his. Men, let God enlighten you about what your wife needs. Ladies, learn how God has created certain needs within you that can only be fulfilled through your relationship with your husband. Both of you must follow God's plan, which is what brings fulfillment, peace, and His grace into your marriage. Who knows better about marriage than the Creator?

God Created Companionship Needs

Read these verses several times, giving special attention to a husband's God-given responsibility for meeting his wife's needs.

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of the water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish. So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church. For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones. "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." (Ephesians 5:25–31)

If you took all these words and put them into one concept, it would be *security*. Men, I hope it's obvious to you that God has a plan that will result in your wife feeling secure. When a man loves his wife as Christ loves His church and commits himself to her above all others, he is providing security.

Security—Safety; a guarantee; freedom from fear; not feeling suspicion or distrust; and the condition of being protected, not exposed to danger.

You play a vital role in meeting your wife's needs. David Jeremiah says the following:

When a husband loves his wife, he gives her the greatest sense of security, and when a husband loves his wife as Christ loves the church, a husband's love produces security, intimacy, identity, and spiritually in his wife.⁹

Husbands, your involvement in your wife's security must be a top priority. It is difficult for us to relate to this. We are pretty secure in ourselves because God has made us to be leaders. But God has instructed us to dwell with our wives "with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel" (1 Peter 3:7). Peter pointed out "that husbands should understand and be considerate of their wives' spiritual, emotional, and physical needs."¹⁰ *Weaker* indicates physical or emotional weakness, not intellectual inferiority. This is not a negative statement, just the way God has made women, and both husbands and wives need to understand God's creative design.

FACT FILE

Security—The state of being free from danger or threat, having confidence that one is secure, and that one's well-being is assured by another, as in a wife resting securely in the husband's leadership.

An examination of Ephesians 5 will show how God has developed a plan for meeting a wife's security needs in marriage and how her husband plays a role in meeting those needs, by God's perfect design. These five needs continue through lesson 8.

Her First Companionship Need

A husband is to love his wife as Christ loved the church.

God knows—as this is His design—that a wife gains security by being loved. He gives husbands clear instruction: "Love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her" (Ephesians 5:25). Here, this word *love* (*agape* in Greek) is a present, active, imperative verb, indicating a command to do and to continue doing without stopping. This same concept was presented in volume 1, lesson 5 when we learned that both spouses have a companionship need for love. However, we are now speaking to husbands about loving their wives.

FACT FILE

Agape—The response of God's heart toward unworthy sinners; God's love demonstrated in self-sacrifice for the benefit of the objects of His love. "God's essential quality that seeks the best interests of others regardless of the others' actions."¹¹ "It involves God doing what He knows is best for man and not necessarily what man desires ... His son to bring forgiveness to man."¹² It is choosing to love unconditionally.

The extent to which a husband is to love his wife is compared with Jesus's love for the church, *for us*. How much did Jesus love the church, and how did He prove it? Jesus proved His love for us, even unto death. We are secure in this love by what Jesus did on the cross, not what we did or what we do. Isn't that a wonderful place to be? And this is something we really need to get our heads around, men. God wants you to love your wife in that same way, *unconditionally*, not based on her performance.

Jesus commands you to love your wife in the same manner as He loves, which ultimately led to His sacrificial death on a cross. Praise the Lord that we are not required to die physically, but rather to "die to ourselves," meaning our selfishness, harshness, and self-will must go. To love as Christ loves the church requires obedience to God's Word, even when we do not feel loving. We must seek God's strength to love our wives properly, not for what they will give back to us or to

manipulate them or control them. Jesus set the example for us, how we are to love. When a husband determines in his heart to die to himself—to his own will—and surrender to God’s will and the Holy Spirit, then this love of God begins to flow toward his wife.

DIG DEEPER

Identify what these Scriptures tell men to do and why they are important principles for loving your wife.

Husbands, love your wives and do not be bitter toward them. (Colossians 3:19)

Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. (Ephesians 4:31)

Describe the types of thoughts and motives you are to have when loving your wife.

And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma. (Ephesians 5:2)

Self-Examination

Now that you have learned God’s expectations for loving your wife from these Scriptures, identify any problem areas the Lord has brought to your mind. Confess your sin to God and follow up by asking your wife’s forgiveness.

Daughters

God is our “Father,” and our wives are His “daughters.” I have one daughter, and I want the absolute best for her. When she believes she has found that special guy, I will invest time and energy into that young man. I will let him know how important and special she is to me, and I will make sure he understands what it means to be a husband and a father. I will be sure he hears God’s truth and use every bit of persuasion I can to help him yield, because I love my daughter.

As a man, you must realize that God sees your wife as His own daughter. He is waiting and willing to pour everything you need into you so you can love your wife His way.

Desire and Action Are Essential

Only by truly desiring to love your wife God’s way will you get past the selfish expectations and conditions that can govern your love for her. As you press in and reach forward in love, you will see your heart change. In volume 2, we looked specifically at the characteristics of love and how we are to love our spouses from 1 Corinthians 13:4–7. Husbands, that Scripture gives a biblical presentation on practical ways to express love. But you must move past knowing to doing, striving, desiring, and laboring to see this love manifested in you toward your wife.

DIG DEEPER

Describe how these principles will help you desire and pursue loving your wife.

And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. (Galatians 6:9)

Flee also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart. (2 Timothy 2:22)

Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, labor of love.
(1 Thessalonians 1:3)

Let love be without hypocrisy. (Romans 12:9)

Now the purpose of the commandment is love from a pure heart, from a good conscience, and from sincere faith. (1 Timothy 1:5)

And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love to one another.
(1 Thessalonians 3:12)

And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment, that you may approve the things that are excellent.
(Philippians 1:9–10)

Only through your strong foundation—your relationship with Christ—are you able to bless your wife with this type of love.

Security and Fear Are Opposites

We must truly love our wives so they can live in security and without fear. This biblical principle shows the contrast between fear and love.

There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love. We love Him because He first loved us.

If someone says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also. (1 John 4:18–21)

John told believers who truly have a love for God that they do not need to fear the judgment day.

Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness in the day of judgment. (1 John 4:17)

One commentary says the following:

A fully developing love gives reassurance to a believer that he or she is right with God, and will enable him to have confidence on the Day of Judgment. The believer does not dreadfully anticipate it.¹³

The believer experiences a perfected love in relation to God. They have full assurance or security, trusting that God will take care of them. In the same way, when you love your wife, it builds trust and security that you will only do what is best for her in harmony with God's will.

Men, are you instilling fear by your behavior? This perfect love John talked about can only come through Christ. God is not telling you to follow His lead and find some inner strength and ability to love your wife this way. He is saying that when you surrender your heart, your desires, and your self-will to Him in obedience and trust, He will fill you with the desire to love your wife, and His love will be pouring out of you to her.

In this life no man will ever be flawlessly perfect in love toward his wife. We humans are a work in progress, but the key is to be progressing.

Being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ. (Philippians 1:6)

Satan has a real stronghold on many men. He tells us, "You'll never change. This is too hard for you. Your wife is causing you do this. This trial is beyond you." These are lies from Satan. If you believe them, it will begin to dictate what you will and won't do and what you will and won't believe. If your wife is insecure or fearful in any way within marriage, first look to yourself.

~~ACTION PLAN~~

Discuss this section together as husband and wife. Husband, note any fears your wife has shared. Then lovingly listen without making excuses, learning how you can better minister to her. Write what you've learned from her here, and ask forgiveness as needed.

Ladies, remember that your husband is a work in progress. As he learns to abide in Christ by spending time in God's Word and in prayer, learns from the trials, and is willing to ask forgiveness, he will begin to be transformed into the image of Christ, which includes his ability to love you. This *agape* love is unconditional. God loves us so much that He sent His Son to die for us, while we were still sinners (Romans 5:8), to show us the value He places on each one of us. Men, we are to love our wives because of the value God has placed on them. This is not in our own strength but by the power of the Holy Spirit who dwells within us if we have received Jesus as Lord and Savior. This is our only measuring tool.

Men, use no other scale by which you measure your behavior, only what God has said. When you do not live up to this love that God describes, have the humility and determination to confess it to God and your wife. One quality of a true leader is humility (Acts 20:19; Titus 3:2), to be willing to admit that you have missed the mark. Take responsibility. *To repent* means "to change direction, turn toward God, and ask forgiveness." He forgives (1 John 1:9).

Avoid What Comes Naturally

Men, what comes naturally is to let your wife's behavior determine how you treat her. Did she do what you *wanted* her to do, what she was *supposed* to do? Did she spend her time wisely and treat you the way you want to be treated?

When others do what we desire, we reward them accordingly with our affection, good will, or approval. But that is *not* love. God's essential quality of love seeks the best interests of others, regardless of their actions. Romans 5:10 says, "When we were enemies we were reconciled to God," and it is the goodness of God that leads us to repentance (Romans 2:4).

God's desire and pursuit was extended in His love to us, even when we did not deserve it. He is not loving us to get something in return, but He extends His loving hand over and over again to win our hearts to the gospel. In the same way, we are to extend this love to our wives so they can see God in us and see His love flowing through us. This does not come naturally.

God is examining us (Hebrews 4:13), and we should be examining ourselves (1 Corinthians 11:31-32). Did I live up to God's example, or did I look at my wife's behavior, what she did for me or didn't do for me, and use that to justify how I am treating her?

God wants you to love and cherish your wife according to her value to Him as His daughter. Men, when you initiate with this kind of love, God will bless you with a secure wife who is much more likely to respect your leadership. However, when she isn't behaving well, you are called by God to follow His lead, not hers. This is a hard truth.

Lesson 7

A Gift from God

Your wife is a gift from God, but she is not perfect. There are times she does or says things that get under your skin, but your response must be in line with God's Word. You made a commitment to serve your wife and love her as Christ loves the church. Spend time daily with the Lord, and let His Holy Spirit convict you when you need it.

When you are upset by the way she is treating you, remember how God loves you. What if all the times you sinned over and over again God lost patience with you and treated you like you deserved? God has never treated you conditionally, and you should never treat your wife that way. When the Holy Spirit checks you like this, repent of your attitude, go to your wife, and ask for her forgiveness. That's your part.

When you miss the mark and allow her behavior or your selfish expectations to dictate how you treat her, God calls that sin, and there is no way out but confession and repentance. When you humble yourself, ask forgiveness, and use the Word of God as your rule for loving, you will experience the transformation of your nature into the image of Christ. It is only by this obedience that you will experience the true love of God flowing between you and your wife.

Her Second Companionship Need

A husband is to sanctify his wife and cleanse her with the washing of water by the Word.

God tells each husband to sanctify and cleanse his wife by the washing of water by the Word.

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, *that* He might *sanctify* and *cleanse her* with the washing of water by the word. (Ephesians 5:25–26, emphasis mine)

This passage clearly tells the husband that love for his wife must display the characteristics of Christ who, loving the church so much, gave Himself up for her. In verse 26, the first word we see is *that*, speaking of *purpose*. Christ gave His life for the church to redeem the church to Himself, so that He may "sanctify" her (set her apart to holiness) and "cleanse her" through the washing of the Word of God. Ultimately, it is Christ who does the sanctifying and cleansing of the wife, but God also has chosen the husband to be responsible in this sanctifying process through his leadership, example, and the Word of God. This is where the washing of the water of the Word comes in. God has given every husband the awesome privilege of using God's precious Word to minister to his wife.

One writer put it this way:

While the commentators disagree about the exact meaning of the phrase, "by the washing of water with the word" (verse 26), the few who even attempt to apply it seem to agree that the practical application of the passage is some form of the husband's assistance in the progressive sanctification process of his wife. As her

spiritual leader, you must “set her apart” (or make her holy), purifying her through the Scriptures. You must help her, through the Word, to remove her spiritual spots and wrinkles and any [other] such thing [verse 27] that does not conform to the image of Christ. The way that you do this is by obeying and using the Word in all of your dealings with her.¹⁴

This information refers to action, not lip service or good intentions. How did they wash clothes in the days when this author penned these words? They didn’t have washing machines. They had a creek. They had buckets. They had to go down to the creek, pull the clothes out, put them on rocks, and physically do it with their hands. That is the image God is portraying. This is intentional work. Love your wife through your actions, what you say, and what you do in all things. This is why God says you need to be a student of His Word (2 Timothy 2:15). How can we wash our wives in God’s Word if we are not in His Word ourselves and living out His truths ourselves?

Self-Examination 1

When a man takes time to learn how to live God’s way and tend to the things God has given him, this is washing his wife in the Word of God.

Men, list the areas where you are not confident that you are tending to your wife according to God’s Word (for example, as a husband, companion, co-parent, in finances, etc.).

Then write a prayer to God, committing yourself to spend time learning His will through personal study or finding someone to disciple you, to help you learn and grow.

Lead by Example

As God has appointed men to be leaders in the home, we cannot excuse ungodly behavior toward our wives or children. Your wife will feel insecure, and maybe even fearful, which is the opposite of God’s will. When God says you are to wash your wife with the water of the Word, He is speaking to you as a priest, or the spiritual leader in your home. Are you spending daily devotional time with the Lord? Does your wife witness you being in the Word and prayer?

The basis of having a relationship with somebody is spending time with them. And the greatest gift given to us through Christ's death for our sins is the opportunity to have personal access to the living God. He is waiting for us, listening to us, and speaking to us through His Holy Spirit.

As leaders we are called to be examples. Spending time each day in the Word and prayer is not just to be seen, but it becomes real when we start living it. A wife will feel secure when she sees the results, when she sees your new attitude toward her and life in general. So, men, it starts with us.

If you are still struggling in this area, please review to volume 1, lesson 7.

DIG DEEPER

Relate these Scriptures to yourself. What attitude and desire should you have toward the Word of God and its cleansing work?

But He answered and said, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.'" (Matthew 4:4)

As newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby.
(1 Peter 2:2)

How can a young man cleanse his way?
By taking heed according to Your word.
With my whole heart I have sought You;
Oh, let me not wander from Your commandments! (Psalm 119:9-10)

Open my eyes, that I may see
Wondrous things from Your law. (Psalm 119:18)

Teach me, O Lord, the way of Your statutes,
And I shall keep it to the end. (Psalm 119:33)

Great peace have those who love Your law,
And nothing causes them to stumble. (Psalm 119:165)

Spiritual Leadership

Men, it is our responsibility, one of our priestly duties, to initiate prayer with our wives every day. *Initiate* it. Some men say it's hard for to pray in front of their wives. But it was hard to ride a bicycle at first, wasn't it? It was a strange, off-balance feeling, maybe even frightening.

Perhaps you are not used to praying out loud. But God wants you to be the spiritual leader, to begin to pray with your wife, and to initiate prayer. It might be challenging and awkward in the beginning. And your wife might not want to pray out loud. It may take weeks, months, or even years before she feels comfortable praying in front of you. But it is not your job to pressure her into it. Your job is to meet the companionship needs God has placed inside her. We will discuss this further in volume 5, *Godly Leadership*.

Do you know what your wife is reading, what she is learning from the Word? Have you helped her develop a devotional time? It is not the responsibility of a church or women's ministry to wash your wife in the Word. It is your responsibility as a husband to help your wife, even becoming involved daily with her in sharing God's Word.

Do you talk about spiritual things? Do you ask her or listen to her struggles and victories as she is seeking to live a godly life? Do you share the things God teaches you in your devotional life? Encourage her in her study, and really mean it. Be sure to share what God says to you without making her feel inferior.

As we become disciples of God's Word, we are able to humbly and lovingly disciple our wives. And as priests in the home, if we have children, we are to disciple them too. Most men have not had an example of this, but do not to leave this to Christian school or church youth group. Those are good additions, but they do not take the place of your leadership.

If you want to fulfill your wife's companionship need in this area, investing your time and effort in becoming a true disciple of Christ is the way to accomplish it. It is not uncommon for the wife to be the one working and worrying about getting to church or being in a Bible study or tending to the spiritual condition of the children.

Men often react with an uncooperative attitude when their wives want spiritual leadership from them. But this is a need placed in your wife by God. They didn't ask for it. You may think she's been nagging at you for years. "Honey, why don't you pray with the kids and me?" Maybe you think you pay enough to send them to a Christian school. This is wrong, and you're being disobedient to Christ. There is a desire in your wife's heart for you to take the spiritual lead (Genesis 3:16). God put that in her.

Ladies, you can get it wrong too. Your attitude can result in a negative influence. Remember to pray for your husband and encourage and affirm him, which is different from nagging, and bears no hint of judgment or condemnation.

Self-Examination 2

Review the list of ways to sanctify your wife in *Appendix J: Biblical Ways a Husband Sanctifies His Wife*, included at the end of this workbook. List specific commitments to the Lord about how you will implement these as your priestly duties.

God Promises to Help

Many Scriptures encourage us to persevere in godly behavior and faith when we find ourselves in difficult situations. Wives, if you are married to a nonbeliever or a husband in rebellion, remember 1 Peter 3:1–4 about submission. Be encouraged.

Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.
(Matthew 11:28)

God knows when we are under the authority of a husband who is out of God's will. He knows all, and He gives us the instruction to trust Him (God) and yield to the authority He has put over us (Romans 13:1–4). As long as it does not require you to sin, trust Him with the outcome. When a wife turns to the Lord and says, "I know I have this need, but I am suffering because my husband is not answering Your call," then her loving heavenly Father will intercede. He promises to supply all our needs. Live in obedience to meeting your husband's companionship needs, and God will bless you in unexpected ways.

DIG DEEPER

Identify what these Scriptures say about how God is involved in your life and how you can trust Him in your marriage.

And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. (Romans 8:28)

Great is our Lord, and mighty in power;
His understanding is infinite. (Psalm 147:5)

The eyes of the Lord are in every place,
Keeping watch on the evil and the good. (Proverbs 15:3)

For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous,
And His ears are open to their prayers;
But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil. (1 Peter 3:12)

In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will. (Ephesians 1:11)

And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:19)

Describe how we are to persevere or be steadfast in difficult situations.

For this reason I also suffer these things; nevertheless I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day. (2 Timothy 1:12)

So that we ourselves boast of you among the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that you endure. (2 Thessalonians 1:4)

Meditate on God's promises to encourage you amid your challenges.

Lesson 8

Cherishing Your Wife

The wife's first two companionship needs were discussed in the previous lessons: love her as Christ loved the church and sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the Word. We identify the three remaining needs in this lesson.

Her Third Companionship Need

A husband must not settle for less than God's perfect will.

God, in His infinite wisdom, challenges us as husbands to not settle for less in our marriages.

That He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish. (Ephesians 5:27)

This verse is not only revealing one of a wife's unique companionship needs, but it also is exhorting men to press in and not become lazy or complacent in the marriage relationship. Many a man has settled for a mediocre relationship with his wife by being ignorant of God's will and standards for a godly marriage, and instead uses only his limited male perspective as a measuring device. Others realize things are not right, yet they do nothing.

The wife sees you making time to further your career, improve your golf game, help others in need, or serve in the church—but not fix your marriage. This is the opposite of what God says in verse 27 above, where He is exhorting men not to settle for anything less than His perfect will for their marriage.

God uses Himself as an example to emulate in Ephesians 5:25, saying, "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her." By doing this, He is elevating the importance and priority a husband is to place on his relationship with his wife.

Self-Examination 1

Ask God to give you His heart toward your wife. Ask Him for the grace to press in and work out these principles you are learning about tending to your wife and meeting her companionship needs. Using the space below, make today the beginning of your commitment to work on this until God takes you to be with Him in heaven.

Her Fourth Companionship Need

A husband must love his wife as his own body.

The Bible continues to emphasize and define a husband's responsibility to sacrificially love his wife by comparing it to his love for himself, his own body.

So husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church. For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones. (Ephesians 5:28–30)

Men, this says we are to treat our wives as an extension of our own bodies. This is difficult and may sound a little weird. Have you ever really listened to the way your wife talks to other women? They are different from us, but we are called to treat them as an extension of ourselves. Women look at life from a whole different perspective than men do.

God wants you to love your wife as an extension of your own body, but it can be hard to relate. However, you can relate to the concept of wanting respect and not being criticized or put down for being who you are. You can relate to wanting your struggles and emotions to be considered reasonable and important. And you can relate to wanting to be loved and understood.

Guys, we need lots of practice. Have you ever noticed how your wife's feelings get hurt over something you think is silly? Or she gets sentimental or emotional about something one of the kids has done? And you are feeling no emotion at all. In some circumstances, you may feel like telling her to look at the facts and deal with it. But you know we can't do that. God has made us men so different, yet He says, "Even though you're so different, I want you to learn how to cherish and nurture her as an extension of your own body."

Your greatest adventure is trying to figure out your wife. Men, you must look at it like that and have a positive attitude. She is the wife God gave you, and you need to learn how to cherish and nurture her as an extension of your own body, even though she is so different from you. A challenge can be an exciting thing, and the reward is a wife that is fulfilled and happy.

Defining the implications of this text in Ephesians and the idea of your wife being an extension of your own body, one commentary puts it this way:

Christ loves the church, not simply as if it were His body, but because it is in fact His body. Husbands therefore are to love their wives, not simply as they love their own bodies, but as being one body with themselves, as indeed they are. Lest the staggering implication of what he has affirmed should fail to register with his readers, Paul puts it in another way to avoid ambiguity.

So intimate is the relationship between man and wife that they are fused into a single entity. For a man to love his wife is to love himself. She is not to be treated as a piece of property, as was the custom in Paul's day. She is to be regarded as an extension of a man's own personality and so part of himself.¹⁵

Have you ever accidentally hit a thumb when hammering a nail or slammed your finger in a drawer? Did you mean to do that? Did the left hand try to grab the hammer out of the right hand and chase it around your body to hit it back? No. When the hammer hit your finger, your whole body worked in absolute unison with gentleness and swiftness to fix and heal it. This is what God calls us to do for our wives: treat them like we do our own bodies. It does not matter if she is angry or frustrated with you or you think she brought the situation upon herself. You are called to tend to your wife with gentleness and care.

When your wife tells you how someone hurt her feelings, you might be tempted to interrupt her and tell her how to fix it. But often she just needs you to listen, which is hard for a man. She just wants to pour her heart out, and you need to learn how to attend to her, not like a man, not like you want, but how she wants. Your wife is unique, and God wants you to get to know her, inside and out, so you can tend to her needs and treat her as an extension of your own body. This feels strange and requires patience and effort, but it will pay off with great rewards when your wife feels that she can trust you with her feelings. *This* is security for a woman.

Self-Examination 2

Men, consider how you've been treating your wife. Identify at least two ways you treat her that you would not do to your own body. Then go to the Lord in prayer to change.

Her Fifth Companionship Need

A husband is to nourish and cherish his wife.

God uses the words *nourish* and *cherish* as He instructs us on how to treat and love our wives. He says, "No one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it" (Ephesians 5:29). This is a self-evident truth—we take care of ourselves.

These same terms are used to describe the farming process of tending to a plant to keep it healthy and productive. The word *husband* in English comes from the word *husbandman*, which means farmer. Men, we can and need to learn how to do this. What we have learned already about loving our wives as Christ loves the church, being the priests of our families, and treating them as extensions of our own bodies are ways of nourishing and cherishing them.

But consider that each plant is different and unique, just like your wife is different from another woman. Some need more water, some need more fertilizer, and some need more pruning. Which plant did God give you? You can't treat a rosebush like corn.

Think about the rosebush, with its brilliant colors and scents. They're amazing and so beautiful. But there are many different species, which require different methods of pruning. Most of the watering is similar, but some species are more prone to bugs and need extra time to be sprayed. Each rosebush has different needs to be as beautiful as it can be. Your job, as the husband, is to find the uniqueness of your wife and learn how to cherish and nurture *her*, to prune and fertilize and water in the ways that will cause her to flourish.

DIG DEEPER

Identify what goals a husband should pursue in relation to his wife.

Husbands, likewise, dwell with them with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered. (1 Peter 3:7)

How to Nurture and Cherish

When this verse describes the wife as "the weaker vessel," it is not talking about physical strength but emotional strength. Women are emotional beings, and that is a good thing. It helps them in their mothering of children and makes them more sensitive to the situations around them. Most men need to learn how to tap into that so they can learn how to be more sensitive and gentle toward their wife, children, and others.

Remember, the wife is a helpmate given to us by God to help complete us. Truthfully, many women, if given a choice, would love to have a switch they could turn on and off when it comes to their emotions. Husband, quit fighting against the reality that your wife is an emotional being and start adapting to her.

DIG DEEPER

Describe how this Scripture applies to accepting your wife's nature.

Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another. (Romans 12:10)

Be sure your attitude is in the right place. She will know when it isn't. Ask God to be truly willing to be available and to listen. Adjust your schedule if needed. Commit time regularly to what your wife needs, and be faithful to nurture and cherish her by showing how important she is to you.

Perhaps your wife likes the house to be spotless, but it's not a big deal to you to pick up after yourself. You might even think it is her job. That's not nurturing and cherishing your wife if that's how God uniquely made her. Adapt to your wife's nature because you cherish her. Clean up after yourself, and make sure the kids clean up their messes too.

Do you set aside the time to fix things around your house that your wife has requested? Or do you put them off? Maybe there is leaky sink or a dead plant that has been by the porch for two years. Whatever it is, at some point your wife asked you nicely to take care of it. And by blowing it off, she feels that you are really blowing her off. Is that cherishing and nurturing your wife? Instead, ask her for a time frame to complete the project. Then be sure to do it in time. And if something interferes, communicate and agree to a new plan. This shows your wife that she is important and being cherished and nurtured like an extension of your own body as her desires are given the same importance as your own.

Self-Examination 3

Husbands, go before the Lord and ask Him to reveal the areas where you have not been nurturing and cherishing your wife. Write them here.

ACTION PLAN 1

Husbands, list four everyday things you can do for your wife that would cherish or nurture her. Then sit with your wife and ask for her input on each one. Be willing to receive her input on what does and does not help her feel nurtured and cherished.

Please note: *I go to work for her* is not valid. You work to provide for your family, which is primarily for the Lord.

But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever. (1 Timothy 5:8)

ACTION PLAN 2

Husband, ask your wife for the five most important things you can do for her around the house, and list them below. Include a time frame for completion and stick to it. If there is a problem, make sure you communicate that to your wife and set another date.

- 1. _____
- 2. _____
- 3. _____
- 4. _____
- 5. _____

Lesson 9

Family Leadership Is a Man's Job

Part of nurturing and cherishing your wife is making sure she is never mistreated. Your kids should speak to her and treat her with the greatest respect and honor because she is your queen. When they disrespect her, deal with it swiftly. Your wife is unique. Find out who she is, and then nurture and cherish her so she feels like that extension of your own body.

Scripture tells us it is our job to oversee peacekeeping in the home, which is part of managing the home (1 Timothy 3:4–5). It is important for men to know how to do this, how to tend to our wives in this area. In many homes, mothers are taking the lead in training the children. They are the ones setting the rules, deciding on the discipline, doing most of the correcting, and disciplining the children. Many wives believe this is their role and would never consider it stepping outside the protection of their husbands. However, those wives will eventually come to resent their husbands because of it.

Establish and Oversee Discipline

Men, this is a serious problem in Christian homes. Maybe you did not have an example of male leadership in the home where you were raised. Maybe your wife thinks you are too harsh, and she needs to protect the children. Perhaps you blew it during the early years and she decided to step in. It might have even caused a lot of contention between you. Men, when you are not leading correctly and lovingly in this area, it affects your marriage in a big way.

And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord. (Ephesians 6:4)

Notice it says “fathers,” not parents or mothers. This is an often overlooked and significant point that we must consider as Christians, as husbands and wives. God wants us to understand it, to embrace it, and to practice it. This is covered in-depth in volume 5, lesson 2. If you desire to learn more about parenting, consider doing the Parenting Is a Ministry series, available at FDM.world.

A blended family is to operate in the same way. If you think because they are not your biological children, you can redesign this instruction and come up with another method, you will never experience fulfillment in your marriage. Yes, there are additional issues to consider, but it does not change the instruction that a husband, a father, has a responsibility to establish rules, oversee discipline, and keep peace within the home. Yes, the wife should be part of planning the rules and means of discipline, but then she should submit herself to the authority of her husband and together follow the discipline plan they have established.

Fathers, God has commissioned us to take the lead in the spiritual training and discipline of our children. Most Christian men have never been taught that this is a God-given responsibility, and many just relinquish that responsibility to their wives. Common protests are: “My wife is closer to the children.” “She understands them.” “She had a better home life.” “My mom did the discipline in our home.” “I’m too busy or impatient or angry.” But God does not accept excuses.

God encourages you through Scripture that He has called you to this responsibility and He will provide what you need to do it well (Deuteronomy 6:4–9; Ephesians 6:4). And part of that provision includes your wife. She has insights, as a mother and a woman, that you do not have. Value and accept her input all along the way. And wives, never criticize or correct your husband in front of the children or degrade him in any way to them in secret. All disagreements should be handled privately, where the kids cannot hear your conversation.

Disobedience Brings Chaos and Destruction

A wife is an essential player in training and discipline. However, when she leads, the marriage is affected negatively in many ways. When a woman is fighting for that position, she will end up feeling overwhelmed, insecure, frustrated, and even unfulfilled in her role as wife and mother. Often she will end up complaining about both her children and husband and eventually become unable to affirm her husband, which is his companionship need.

Men, when a wife is not affirming us, what do we do? We seek affirmation somewhere else. We go to our jobs, hobbies, people, activities, or even over-involve ourselves in ministry. And wives may do the same by overworking inside or outside the home, shopping, or seeking entertainment away from the family. As a husband and father, do you feel like the odd man out because your wife and children have a life of their own, and she is spending all her time and attention, getting her fulfillment from them?

Wives, if your life revolves around the children and their activities, and your husband is low on the priority scale, or if you are pursuing activities out of resentment or lack of fulfillment in your marriage, something is very wrong. Both of you need to spend some time to get this right, because failure in this area may lead to further resentment and unfulfillment.

The pain of a broken home can last a lifetime if not dealt with biblically. Fathers must commit the time to learn to be a parent. Any man who attended college or has spent countless hours perfecting skills for a sport knows that both desire and effort are necessary to succeed. It takes hundreds of hours to learn to hit that little white golf ball straight. How many hours are you willing to invest to learn to be the parent God wants you to be? These are the most important things we will ever do here on earth.

Many of us think our kids are okay if they're not killing anybody or shooting heroin. But God says if you're not leading, if you're not tending to your wife in this area, you are not going to experience the fullness He wants for you, and that will open the door of temptation, the door to things in your life that God doesn't want to be opened. This will definitely affect your ability to fulfill your wife's companionship needs.

Many wives are leading the kids, handling discipline and all, and they are burned out. Instead of being the nurturing mother God has called them to be, they find themselves nagging, lecturing, and arguing with the children, having a hard time even showing affection, especially as they become teenagers. Any of these is proof that a home is out of order because the man is not leading or she won't surrender to his leadership in the area of raising the children.

Mothers, I am not saying you are not involved. Absolutely, you are our completers. A wise man pursues his wife's input on setting rules. A wise man gets input from his wife on disciplining the children. He seeks her perspective for devising corrective discipline, and he will delegate responsibility to her when he is not present to carry it out. Teamwork is essential and is God's will. And when Mom is handling the kids in Dad's absence, the children know his authority is behind everything she says and does. And they also know that he will deal with any disrespect to her swiftly. This is how he provides security for his wife as she deals with the children.

Tending to Your Wife

Consider three important points when learning to tend to your wife.

1. It takes time.

Many men had bad examples or no example at home, so it takes time to learn. Failed efforts are part of the learning process, as is the need to ask forgiveness, which shows your wife that you want to change and learn how to be understanding and sympathetic. When your wife gets upset, walks away, and says, "You don't understand," that is your cue for damage control.

Husbands, likewise, dwell with them with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered. (1 Peter 3:7)

DIG DEEPER

Identify two ways you can show this attitude toward your spouse.

For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. (Hebrews 4:15)

2. It takes willingness.

Men, we need to show willingness and desire to learn and adapt. Go to her and say, "Help me understand what I could have done better." And, wives, do not throw your emotions in his face. Men need facts. Be specific so your man can learn to adapt.

DIG DEEPER

Note how these biblical principles can help you to be willing to adapt. Give an example for each.

Let no one seek his own, but each one the other's well-being. (1 Corinthians 10:24)

Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, leading to edification. For even Christ did not please Himself; but as it is written, “The reproaches of those who reproached You fell on Me.” (Romans 15:2–3)

But Jesus called them to Himself and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.” (Matthew 20:25–28)

ACTION PLAN

Husbands, this is where you take the lead. At a nonconfrontational time—maybe take her out for dinner—ask her this question, “What are three ways I have failed to understand you and your needs?” You must be prepared and really desire to humbly take the time to hear and understand. Pray with her before you start the conversation. Write what you learned below.

3. It takes communication.

Men, we need to communicate, to talk through these things. This means we need to listen, and wives need to communicate without judging or attacking. Praise God if your man is trying to learn. Never use it as an opportunity to cut him down.

DIG DEEPER

Identify how these biblical principles can help you to communicate in a godly way.

Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers. (Ephesians 4:29)

Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one. (Colossians 4:6)

The ability to communicate comes with time and a mutual willingness. Husband, your wife's security comes from knowing that it is your desire to treat her as you treat yourself. She will feel this as you learn how to tend to her uniqueness in practical ways that demonstrate love and gentleness toward her. When your wife sees you yielding to God, being transformed, it is this testimony that will help her surrender to your leadership in the home.

If you need help to break the cycle of any of these issues, complete *Appendix G: Breaking the Cycle*.

Responding Biblically to Opposition

Some women, hurt by husbands, fathers, or other men in their lives, may have developed resentment. If you have a wife who won't let you lead or responds to your suggestions with accusations and anger, complete *Appendix I: Husband's Biblical Response to Opposition*.

Lesson 10

Proper Leadership Is Consistent

Men, do not disappear into your projects and hobbies or start acting like your wife does not exist. God says it is necessary to correct, in humility, and this means standing strong in your responsibility to oversee your family. Do not disengage.

Some couples have gotten into a routine for years, and the men have gotten scared to weigh in because the wife pulls out both machine guns and starts shooting. But you must see yourself as appointed by God to establish and keep your family in order. You need to express to your wife that you want her to support you and work with you on a particular decision or issue. Stick with your corrective ideas, and do not argue, but be gentle, able to teach, patient, and humble.

You might say something like this. “Honey, we’re going to stop this. I know you want to throw all these things in the mix, but it confuses the issue. I’m not going there. We need to change. And I’m willing to be patient. I want to pray about it and come up with a solution.” When you do, your wife may react with anger, but you are not the first to go through it. Many men over the years have started to apply this process, and it brought war into their homes. Some men have had to take a walk because their wives exploded when he refused to argue. He wasn’t playing by their old rules anymore. He was not screaming back, being defensive, and acting pitiful, so she worked herself into a tizzy.

Some couples go through this routine several times. Often the wife would be bawling her eyes out when the husband returned from his walk. She had to realize that her problem was trying to lead in opposition to God’s plan. Once your wife realizes her sin, be patient with her as she might have a hard time trusting God and you to lead your family.

Men, we need to follow God’s Word, even in the face of opposition. Your wife may not realize that her defiant opposition and disrespect is damaging the relationship, but God is faithful if we are patiently obedient and do it His way. And remember, failure is predictable, but we simply need to repent and ask forgiveness of both God and our spouses and continue on the right path. Satan is the accuser. God is our deliverer.

Self-Examination

Identify at least two things that need to change in your home to be in line with God’s Word. Then go to God to ask Him to provide the right heart and time to discuss them with your spouse.

A Final Word to Men

Understanding God's Word, His instructions, is not so difficult. The hard part is denying our flesh and yielding to His Spirit, then humbly taking responsibility each time we fail by asking forgiveness. If you want to prove to God, yourself, your wife, and your children that you desire change, then make a commitment to crawl up in God's lap every day and beg for His grace and mercy. It begins there.

In volume 1, lesson 2 of our study, we stressed the importance of building intimacy with God by abiding in His presence. This is where we receive the power to obey and fulfill His will. You cannot love your wife and nurture and cherish her the way God desires in your own strength. It was never God's intention for us to try and make it alone. God created us to be in fellowship with Him, to have His love and power poured into us. That is why Jesus died for our sins on that cross, to bring us back into fellowship with the Father. When you receive God's gift of salvation in Christ, He takes you just the way you are, takes you into His house as His beloved child.

Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue. (2 Peter 1:2-3)

As God's child you are a partaker of His very nature and equipped to do all things the way He would. But just as we can ignore and rebel against our earthly parents, God does not force us to come to Him or yield to His Word or will. You must choose to spend time with Him every day. It is just foolish not to jump at the chance to ask the God of the universe to give you grace and mercy and teach you the things He has for you. God is not a liar, and all His promises are yes in Jesus Christ.

For all the promises of God in Him are Yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us. (2 Corinthians 1:20)

God says in His Word that a marriage, the relationship between you and your wife, is to reflect Christ's relationship to His church. Bringing that glory to God through marriage cannot occur when we are behaving according to ignorance and selfishness. When you make the commitment to follow His instructions, desire to please Him above yourself, and endure through hard times and failure, you will experience fulfillment that you never imagined possible. He will reward you in your obedience to Him.

But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. (Hebrews 11:6)

Instead of constantly asking God to change your spouse, pray for Him to change *you*. Our creator God has provided the way. All we need to do is enter in. He really wants to bless us.

Prayer of Commitment

Thank You, God, that You did not ask us to do these things in our own power and might. It is by Your grace, by Your wonderful promises, and we pray that You would do a mighty work in our hearts. Lord, if we have been doubting who we are in You, if we have been seeing ourselves in the way we were in our past, our past experiences, our past failures, we pray that You would wash our minds with Your truth and promises.

God, we need to trust that we are Your children and that You enable us to do all things according to Your will. Lord, You have called us, anointed us, and You will teach us. Give us a desire to invest the time to learn how to be a great husband/father and wife/mother in our home. Lord, I pray that You would stir us up. Help us to see the importance of this in our lives. Please continue to bring healing, forgiveness, and reconciliation. God, it is our hearts' desire that You would be glorified in our lives. We thank You, we praise You, and we ask these things in Jesus's name. Amen.

For Further Application

To help you apply what you have learned, complete *Appendix K: Wife's Needs* and *Appendix L: Companionship Needs*.

If you need help to determine the strongholds that are holding you back from God's best for your marriage, complete *Appendix M: Common Stumbling Blocks*.

Appendix Resources

These appendices are included as additional resources. They are found throughout all five volumes, but not all appendices are included in each volume. If you wish to review a specific appendix, find where it is located in the list below.

Appendix A: Commitment Letter	Volume 1
Appendix B: Committing Your Life to Christ	Volume 1
Appendix C: Developing Daily Intimacy with God	Volume 1
Appendix D: Recommended Books	Volume 1
Appendix E: Effective Listening Self-Evaluation	Volume 2
Appendix F: Improving Your Loving Communication	Volume 2
Appendix G: Breaking the Cycle	Volumes 2 & 3
Appendix H: Husband's Needs	Volume 3
Appendix I: Husband's Biblical Response to Opposition	Volume 3
Appendix J: Biblical Ways a Husband Sanctifies His Wife	Volume 3
Appendix K: Wife's Needs	Volume 3
Appendix L: Companionship Needs	Volume 3
Appendix M: Common Stumbling Blocks	Volumes 3–5
Appendix N: Physical Intimacy in Marriage for Men	Volume 4
Appendix O: Physical Intimacy in Marriage for Women	Volume 4
Appendix P: Trust and Forgiveness	Volumes 2–5
Appendix Q: Marriage Self-Evaluation	Volume 5
Appendix R: Glossary	Volumes 1–5

Appendix G

Breaking the Cycle

This exercise will help you confront the areas that need to be changed and break the cycle of sinful behavior. God's grace is never insufficient. The problem is *our will*.

Step 1

Each night, spend some time alone with the Lord. Ask Him to soften your heart and speak to you about what you could have done differently during discussions, arguments, or situations with your spouse during that day. Write your findings in the space provided or in a journal.

Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you are disqualified.
(2 Corinthians 13:5)

Reflection

Was there something I could have said or done that would have glorified God or stopped a situation from turning into an argument?

Step 2

As you read these verses, ask the Lord to reveal areas needing improvement.

Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails.
(1 Corinthians 13:4–8)

Reflection 1: Were you impatient? *Suffering long* means you exercised the fruit of the Spirit.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness. (Galatians 5:22)

Did your flesh try to seek justice for a perceived wrong or battle to get your own way? Explain.

Reflection 2: Were you unkind? The opposite of kindness is unkindness.

Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another. (Romans 12:10)

Did you provoke your spouse? Did you get angry, raise your voice, or say hurtful things? Did you judge or ignore, or are you resentful toward your spouse? Explain.

Reflection 3: Was jealousy a motive behind the reaction toward your spouse?

Let us behave properly as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts. (Romans 13:13–14 NASB)

Respond to the question.

Reflection 4: Were you haughty or arrogant? Did you belittle your spouse or make them feel unimportant?

Likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to your elders. Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble." (1 Peter 5:5)

Reflection 5: Were you rude or did you act unbecoming?

Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers. (Ephesians 4:29)

Did you embarrass your spouse or say something bad about them in front of someone else? Were you rude, or did you do something they have asked you not to do? Explain.

Reflection 6: Were you only thinking of yourself and not considering your spouse's viewpoint? Did you defensively justify your position or excuse your actions?

Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. (Philippians 2:3)

Reflection 7: Were you harboring bad thoughts toward your spouse for minutes, hours, or days before this situation occurred? God has told us not to harbor bad thoughts, but to forgive.

Casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. (2 Corinthians 10:5)

You need to take responsibility for letting your mind be consumed with bad or evil thoughts toward your spouse. God knows us. He sees our past, present, and future sins, yet His thoughts toward us are only good (Psalm 139:17–8). How can we justify evil thoughts toward our spouses? If this is your problem, what thoughts and attitudes should you forsake, confess, and leave with the Lord? Identify specific areas or origins causing your bitterness or resentment.

Respond and add a prayer asking God to change your heart.

Reflection 8: Have you been allowing discouragement and hopelessness toward your marriage to overwhelm you?

Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us. (Romans 5:5)

For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope. (Jeremiah 29:11)

Have you doubted God and His almighty power to intercede for you? Love “hopes all things,” not doubts all things. If you doubt God, focusing on past or present problems and not on the loving all-powerful God, you will become discouraged and act this out with your spouse. In what ways have you been doubting God regarding your marriage?

Explain and confess to doubting God’s power and goodness to you. Write a prayer asking for help to trust Him with your marriage.

Step 3

Pray and ask for God's forgiveness.

Step 4

Ask God for humility and strength, and ask Him to provide the best time to sit down with your spouse, admit your faults, and ask for forgiveness. Pray together, asking God for His strength to break the ungodly and sinful habits that have been practiced over time.

Understanding how to meet each other's companionship needs as husband and wife takes time and loving communication. It also takes a willing heart that desires to learn and change.

Do you agree? ___ Yes ___ No

Are you finished learning? ___ Yes ___ No

Write your prayer to change and your commitment to pray for God's grace each day to break these bad habits.

Appendix H

Husband's Needs

If couples are to succeed in building a healthy marriage, they must learn to meet each other's companionship needs. These worksheets are essential to applying what you have learned in the workbooks. Read the instructions first, complete the following worksheets, and then review the material with your wife.

Worksheet 1: Husband, do you feel affirmed by your wife?

This worksheet will help husbands identify specific, God-given companionship needs and provide guidance for wives. By private and prayerful assessment, a man can reveal his perspective about each area of the relationship and show his wife how to better meet his needs. Completing this worksheet can lead to new or renewed understanding of why a husband may not be enjoying intimacy or companionship with his wife.

Often, when a man is not affirmed in some area, his flesh or the Enemy bring confusion, and he seeks consolation elsewhere. Many men, due to this problem, are not investing themselves thoroughly in the marital relationship and in the family. This may result in failure to provide the wife's companionship needs. This can become a destructive, downward spiral if not met with trust and confidence in the Word and power of God.

Do not discuss this worksheet with your wife until both worksheets are completed.

Worksheet 2: Specific, practical, nonjudgmental suggestions for your wife

Prayerfully write practical, nonjudgmental suggestions your wife can follow to improve her affirmation of you in specific areas. It is important not to overwhelm her initially by working on every area that is not perfect. Give one or two suggestions for each area you rated as a 4 or less.

Some men may have difficulty completing this worksheet. But do not abandon the activity. Ask God to influence your suggestions. Be specific, not general. Make the suggestions practical so implementation is possible and nonjudgmental in order to not discourage your wife. Seek additional help from a church leader, an assigned marriage mentor, or your pastor if necessary.

Further Suggestions

After you complete both worksheets, you are ready to discuss this with your wife.

- Make sure your wife has a way to take notes and remember responses to your specific, practical, nonjudgmental suggestions.
- Find a private place and time for the two of you to discuss at least two suggestions for each area from worksheets 1 and 2 where you rated your wife as a 4 or lower.
- Communicate these improvement areas in a way that glorifies Christ. Seek help if things become difficult, but do not abandon this exercise.

- Begin this discussion in prayer, asking God for grace and gentleness in communication, a receptive heart, and protection from the attacks of the Enemy and his attempts to discourage obedience to Christ.
- Resist any temptation to be defensive or angry.
- Ask your wife to repeat what she hears you saying before doing any writing and to be specific in her responses.

Remember

- God blesses obedience.
- Faithful completion all homework is the beginning of a truly wonderful relationship with your spouse in Christ.
- Our transformation takes place only as we abide in Him. Daily devotions and obedience to His Word, including confession and repentance of our mistakes, are critical to this process.
- To see Jesus work miracles, the disciples had to follow Him.

Practice loving communication, biblical forgiveness, and reconciliation—the tools God uses to break up the hardened soil of our hearts so His Word and grace can have the impact He desires. God will have victory if we will come to Him, hear Him, and yield to His instructions.

Worksheet 1, Husband: *Self-Examination*

Use this worksheet to rate how you feel your wife is affirming you. This is not a time to be vindictive but to begin to bring clarity, healing, and change in these areas. Prayerfully complete this worksheet.

See *Appendix P: Trust and Forgiveness* if needed.

Husbands, do you feel affirmed by your wife in these areas?

Rate each area below from 0 to 5. (0 = Not at all affirming; 5 = Very affirming)

Spiritual

Going to church	_____	Praying together	_____
Praying with children	_____	Bible study with children	_____
Discussing personal devotions	_____	Accepting your leadership	_____

Communication

Caring about your day's events at the office or job	_____
Able to share honestly how you feel about all subjects	_____
Discussing finances	_____
Always speaks with a loving, affirming tone	_____
Makes herself available each day to talk	_____
Feel safe to share deepest needs or emotions with her	_____
Feel free to laugh or cry with her	_____
Always speaks honorably to you	_____
Always speaks honorably about you to others	_____
Tells you she loves you often	_____

Physical Fulfillment

Regular sexual relations	_____
Able to share openly your desires for physical fulfillment	_____

Non-Sexual Touching

Cuddling	_____
Holding hands	_____
Hugging	_____
Massaging	_____
Kissing	_____

Parenting

Willing to trust your decisions in discipline	_____
Supports you when disciplining children	_____
Supports rules that have been set by you	_____
Always speaks honorably about you in front of the children	_____

You are halfway done. Do not discuss this worksheet with your wife until you have completed the next worksheet.

Worksheet 2, Husband: ~~ACTION PLAN~~

This exercise prepares you to *lovingly* communicate your needs to your wife without attacking or condemning her and to provide specific, practical, nonjudgmental suggestions for improvement. The result is a prepared, reasonable foundation for loving communication, without an attitude of hostility or condemnation, complete with practical guidelines.

The needs of men and women are different as a part of God’s design. They also see life from different perspectives, so we must make our needs known to our spouses. Your suggestions must be as complete as possible, with specific explanations and positive encouragement, but also as brief as possible. Consider how your suggestions might sound if someone else were giving them to you. Do not compromise, but be gentle and considerate.

Provide suggestions for your wife to improve in the areas you rated a 4 or lower on worksheet 1. For example, if you rated *Regular sexual relations* at a 3, you might ask your wife to have a more cooperative attitude throughout the week, to initiate sex a few times per month, or to engage in intimacy two or more times per week.

Spiritual

Communication

Physical Fulfillment

Non-Sexual Touching

Parenting

Examples for Worksheet 2, Husband

The following are examples of specific, practical, nonjudgmental suggestions for meeting your companionship needs in each area. Review *Appendix L: Companionship Needs* to gain the right perspective and heart when discussing these companionship needs with each other.

Spiritual

Husband rated wife as a 2 for *Accepting your leadership*.

How can we work together to help you accept my leadership when addressing spiritual matters with the children? Will you commit to letting me address the issues with kids before you say something, and then when we are alone, we can discuss the situation so I can hear your input and any suggestions for how I handled it.

Communication

Husband rated wife as a 2 for *Discussing finances*.

I know discussing finances is not an easy subject for us, so how can we communicate about it? Maybe we can plan a time to get away for a few hours where we will not be interrupted. That way we can pray and discuss it more thoroughly. Let's commit to have an expense budget written out by the end of the month.

Husband rated wife as a 1 for *Always speaks honorably to you*.

I know I have not been the best example as we have been learning. I really need your affirmation; it will really help me in working on the needed changes. Can we agree that we will discuss it when we say or do something that is not affirming or is hurtful? When the other person brings it to our attention, we will be open to hear and learn from each other what we can say or do differently. Also, can we set some time aside to discuss how we communicate to each other and practice asking forgiveness when we offended each other? Let's work together to bring changes.

Physical Fulfillment

Husband rated wife as a 2 for *Regular sexual relations*.

I would like us to come to an agreement as to how often we will have sexual relations each week. I really need your support and affirmation in this area.

Husband rated wife as a 2 for *Able to share openly your desires for physical fulfillment*.

Can we please talk openly about each other's sexual needs and fulfillment? Maybe we can set some time aside on the weekend to discuss this.

Non-Sexual Touching

Husband rated wife as a 1 for *Cuddling and Hugging*.

I would like it if we could just sit together, cuddle, and hold hands when we are walking and show more outward affection to each other.

Husband rated wife as a 2 for *Kissing*.

It would also be nice if you could kiss me when I come home or when you are leaving. This really helps me feel affirmed.

Parenting

Husband rated wife as a 2 for *Willing to trust your decisions in discipline*.

Could you please follow my leadership in the disciplining of the children? I need your support and affirmation when disciplining the children, and it would be very reassuring to the kids and me if you did this.

Husband rated wife as a 1 for *Supports rules that have been set by you*.

Could you please support and follow the rules that have been set by us? If you do not agree with a rule after we have discussed it, let's talk it through. When you support me in this, you are affirming my leadership and it helps me to be a better father.

Husband rated wife as a wife a 2 for *Always speaks honorably about you in front of the children*.

Sometimes you speak negatively about me or toward me in front of the kids. Do you think we can go into our bedroom and discuss those things that I seem to be doing wrong instead of doing it in front of the children?

Appendix I

Husband's Biblical Response to Opposition

When you need to present a difficult issue to your spouse, first review these instructions to handle opposition in a biblical way.

God tells us what to do 2 Timothy.

And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will. (2 Timothy 2:24–26)

This passage offers six points for success.

1. **“Must not quarrel” (verse 24).** Do not argue or become defensive. What bad habits have you developed? Pointing out your spouse’s weaknesses, elaborating on your strengths, or calling them crazy will never work. It takes two people to argue, but only one to stop it.
2. **“Be gentle” (verse 24).** This means not being harsh, mean, or insulting, which includes body language and noises such as snorting, blowing, and sighing.
3. **“Able to teach” (verse 24).** Avoid being emotional. Try to bring clarity through logic and fact. Diffuse anger by calmly defining what you think the situation is, restating what you believe your spouse is saying, and asking questions.
4. **“Patience” (verse 24).** This quality is one of the attributes of love. Do you ever feel like God doesn’t understand the spouse you are stuck with? Read the book of Job in the Old Testament. Your situation is better. Reading between the lines, you can see that Job and his wife did not have a good relationship. And added to that, consider the trials that came upon Job. Obviously his wife was not on his side. Just like former saints who endured much to do God’s will, we are called to endure with patience and a good attitude.
5. **“Humility” (verse 25).** Having a humble heart means you do not see yourself as better or more important than your spouse, but totally equal in the sight of God. If you intend to address your spouse about their behavior, it must be done from a position of equality, not superiority. Remember, you are not perfect as they are not perfect. Only God is perfect, and He only is qualified to judge.
6. **“Correcting” (verse 25).** This means learning from the situation and coming up with a solution to the problem. It is a sin for a man to relinquish his responsibilities and disengage or for a woman to take control and lead. Together a husband and wife need to prayerfully seek the Lord to solve a problem or implement a practice that glorifies the Lord.

Self-Examination

When addressing problems or perceived wrongs, consider each of the points just defined. Read through the list, ask God to reveal areas needing change, and write them below. Where you have failed, ask forgiveness from God, then from your spouse. Pray about the areas, daily bringing them before the Lord until they are worked out in your life.

For further study, see *Appendix G: Breaking the Cycle*.

Appendix J

Biblical Ways a Husband Sanctifies His Wife

To fulfill your wife's companionship needs, you must invest your time and effort in becoming a true disciple of Christ. It is not uncommon for the wife to be the one working and worrying about getting to church, being in a Bible study, or tending to the spiritual condition of the children.

These suggestions, adapted from Lou Priolo's book, *The Complete Husband: A Practical Guide to Biblical Husbanding*, should be your first priorities as leader of the home.

- Be sure your wife has enough time in her daily schedule for personal Bible study and prayer. This may involve getting up earlier or rearranging your schedule so you can watch the children during this time.
- Spend time with her regularly (at least once a week) in Bible study.
- Encourage her to ask you for help in answering any questions she may have about Bible doctrine or application.
- Make and explain your decisions based on Scripture.
- Commend her for the biblical character traits she possesses (reverence, self-control, discretion, love, joy, peace, etc.).
- Make every effort to provide her with valid biblical reasons when you can't give her what she wants, and explain those reasons to her.
- Be alert to even the smallest indications of spiritual growth and maturity in her, and praise her for them.
- Be faithful in your church attendance as a couple and a family.
- Encourage other opportunities she may have to study Scripture (individually or with others).
- Learn how to relate Scripture to life and life to Scripture. Talk of them in everyday activities (Deuteronomy 6:7).
- If your wife enjoys reading, invest in biblically sound books and Christian biographies.
- Make the dinner hour an enjoyable time, and be open to discuss biblical truth and personal applications of Scripture.
- Determine which areas in her life she desires to change most and why she desires to change them. Use these areas as springboards to search Scripture together for God's answers. Be sure you also tell your wife the changes you'd like to see in your own life, and seek her assistance and prayers.
- Make time each week to disciple your children. See *Appendix C: Developing Daily Intimacy with God* and *Appendix D: Recommended Books*.

Appendix K

Wife's Needs

If couples are to succeed in building a healthy marriage, they must learn to meet each other's companionship needs. These worksheets are essential to applying what you have learned in the workbooks. Read the instructions first, complete the following worksheets, and then review the material with your husband.

Worksheet 1: Wives, do you feel secure and fulfilled?

This worksheet reveals the God-given companionship needs God put within a wife and helps provide direction for meeting them. By private and prayerful assessment of her husband's success at meeting these needs, she can provide him with an evaluation from her perspective. This process will reveal why and where the marriage is struggling and show a husband how to improve at meeting his wife's needs. This will also provide the wife with a new or renewed understanding as to why she may have trouble pursuing intimacy and companionship with her husband.

When a wife is not receiving enough love and security, she is vulnerable to temptations of the flesh, or Satan, which can lead to satisfying these needs with other people and activities, thereby neglecting her husband. This results in failure to provide the affirmation he needs by placing him in a lower priority than children, career, or outside activities. Destruction and damage to the marriage will follow if this downward spiral is not turned around by placing trust and confidence in the Word and power of God.

Do not discuss this worksheet with your husband until both worksheets are completed.

Worksheet 2: Specific, practical, nonjudgmental suggestions for your husband

Prayerfully write practical, nonjudgmental suggestions for your husband about how to meet your companionship needs. Provide one or two ideas for improvement wherever you rate him at a 4 or lower. Ask for God's help to define your needs and to make your requests reasonable.

This may be difficult, but do not abandon the activity. Be prayerful. Tell your husband what you need, then make specific, practical suggestions so implementation is possible. Be nonjudgmental to avoid discouraging him. If necessary, seek additional help from a church leader, an assigned marriage mentor, or your pastor.

Further Suggestions

After you complete both worksheets, you are ready to meet and discuss the outcome with your husband.

- Make sure your husband has a way to take notes and remember responses to your specific, practical, nonjudgmental suggestions.
- Find a private place and time for the two of you to discuss at least two suggestions for each

area from worksheets 1 and 2 that you rated a 4 or lower.

- Communicate these improvement areas in a way that glorifies Christ. Seek help if things become difficult, but do not abandon this exercise.
- Begin this discussion in prayer, asking God for grace and gentleness in communication, a receptive heart, and protection from the attacks of the Enemy and his attempts to discourage obedience to Christ.
- Resist any temptation to become defensive or angry.
- Ask your husband to repeat what he hears you saying before doing any writing and to be specific in his responses.

Remember:

- God blesses obedience.
- Faithful completion of all homework is the beginning of a truly wonderful relationship with your spouse in Christ.
- Our transformation takes place only as we abide in Him. Daily devotions and obedience to His Word, including confession and repentance of our mistakes, are critical to this process.
- To see Jesus work miracles, the disciples had to follow Him.

Practice loving communication, biblical forgiveness, and reconciliation—the tools God uses to break up the hardened soil of our hearts so His Word and grace can have the impact He desires. God will have victory if we come to Him, hear Him, and yield to His instructions.

Worksheet 1, Wife: *Self-Examination*

Use this worksheet to rate how you feel fulfilled by your husband in these areas. This is not a time to be vindictive but to begin to bring clarity, healing, and change in these areas. Prayerfully complete this worksheet.

See *Appendix P: Trust and Forgiveness* if needed.

Wives, do you feel affirmed by your husband in these areas?

Rate each area below from 0 to 5. (0 = Not at all affirming; 5 = Very affirming)

Spiritual

Going to church	_____	Praying together	_____
Praying with children	_____	Bible study with children	_____
Discussing personal devotions	_____	Providing godly leadership	_____

Communication

Caring about your day's events	_____
Able to share honestly how you feel about all subjects	_____
Discussing finances	_____
Always speaks with love and gentleness	_____
Makes himself available each day to talk	_____
Feel safe to share deepest needs or emotions with him	_____
Feel free to laugh or cry with him	_____
Always speaks lovingly to you	_____
Always speaks honorably about you to others	_____
Tells you he loves you often	_____

Physical Fulfillment

Regular sexual relations	_____
Able to share openly your desires for physical fulfillment	_____

Non-Sexual Touching

Cuddling	_____
Holding hands	_____
Hugging	_____
Massaging	_____
Kissing	_____

Parenting

Willing to lead in the discipline of the children	_____
Does not allow the children to disrespect you	_____
Cares about and participates in the children's interests	_____
Always speaks honorably about you in front of the children	_____
Willing to show proper affection to the children	_____

You are halfway done. Do not discuss this worksheet with your husband until you have completed the next worksheet.

Worksheet 2, Wife: ~~ACTION PLAN~~

This exercise prepares you to *lovingly* communicate your needs to your husband without attacking or condemning him and to provide specific, practical, nonjudgmental suggestions for improvement. The result is a prepared, reasonable foundation for loving communication, without an attitude of hostility or condemnation, complete with practical guidelines.

The needs of men and women are different as a part of God’s design. They also see life from different perspectives, so we must make our needs known to our spouses. Your suggestions must be as complete as possible, with specific explanations and positive encouragement, but also as brief as possible. Consider how your suggestions might sound if someone else were giving them to you. Do not compromise, but be gentle and considerate.

Provide suggestions for your husband to improve in the areas you rated a 4 or lower on worksheet 1. Consider things you want him to do, or not do, in each area. For example, if you rated *Discussing finances* at a 2, you might ask him to be willing to calmly discuss an income and expense budget together and commit to a joint monthly review.

Spiritual

Communication

Physical Fulfillment

Non-Sexual Touching

Parenting

Examples for Worksheet 2, Wife

The following are examples of specific, practical, nonjudgmental suggestions for meeting your companionship needs in each area. Review *Appendix L: Companionship Needs* to gain the right perspective and heart when discussing these companionship needs with each other.

Spiritual

Wife rated husband as a 3 for *Going to church*.

How can we work together as a team when getting ready to go to church? Maybe you could help with the kids. (Or) How can we be more diligent to plan on going each Sunday? (Or) Will you commit to go to church every Sunday, and let it be the exception that keeps us from going, not the exception when we do go?

Wife rated husband as a 0 for *Bible study with children*.

Do you think it would be possible to have some type of Bible study with the children, maybe once a week? What would be the best time and day for you?

Wife rated husband as a 2 for *Praying together*.

Would you pray with me each day in the morning or before we go to bed?

Wife rated husband as a 1 for *Praying with children*.

Would you pray with the children and me each day in the morning or before we go to bed? I would like us to work as a team in encouraging our children about the importance of prayer.

Communication

Wife rated husband as a 2 for *Discussing finances*.

I know finances is not an easy subject for us, so how can we communicate about it? Maybe we can plan a time to get away for a few hours where we will not be interrupted. That way we can pray and discuss it thoroughly.

Wife rated husband as a 1 for *Makes himself available each day to talk*.

I really would like it if we could spend more time talking with each other on a daily basis. What do you think would be a good time for you to do this?

Wife rated husband as a 2 for *Tells you he loves you often*.

I would like to hear “I love you” more often. It really encourages me and gives me security. Maybe you could put that on your prayer list.

Physical Fulfillment

Wife rated husband as a 2 for *Able to share openly your desires for physical fulfillment*.

Can we please talk openly about each other’s sexual needs and fulfillment? Maybe we can set some time aside on the weekend to discuss this.

Non-Sexual Touching

Wife rated husband as a 1 for *Cuddling and Hugging*.

It would be very encouraging to me when you touch me that it does not always lead to sexual relations. I would like it if we could just sit together and cuddle, just because you love me and want to show affection.

Wife rated husband as a 2 for *Kissing*.

It would also be nice if you could kiss me when you are leaving whenever possible. This really helps me feel secure.

Parenting

Wife rated husband as a 2 for *Willing to lead in the discipline of the children*.

Could you please be involved in the disciplining of the children when you are home? I want to support you in any way I can in their discipline, and it would be very reassuring to the kids and me if you did this.

Wife rated husband as a 1 for *Cares about and participates in the children's interests*.

I know you are very busy, but could you please pray about participating in some of the children's interests and events? It would be great for them to do this with you.

Wife rated husband as a 3 for *Always speaks honorably about you in front of the children*.

Sometimes you speak negatively about me in front of the kids. Do you think we can go into our bedroom and discuss those things that I seem to be doing wrong instead of doing it in front of the children?

Appendix L

Companionship Needs

Men and women perceive situations differently and respond differently to the same words or actions. This means that a husband and wife will approach mutual problems from different perspectives, and opportunities will arise requiring them to cooperate and compromise.

God created human beings, male and female, and placed unique companionship needs within each. Unique can mean special or wonderful, but it also means different. A man does not instinctively know or understand the needs of a woman, and vice versa. To have a fulfilling marriage, each spouse needs to be willing to learn how to meet the unique needs of the other.

Since all marriages involve people, and all people are selfish, there is a 100 percent chance that frustrations and disappointments will surface in the relationship. This leads to coping patterns such as anger, insults, bitterness, defensiveness, pouting, stuffing, stewing, and more. These become habits that must be broken and replaced with appropriate attitudes and actions.

When problems arise, it is an opportunity for men and women to use the trials of life to grow personally and learn how to meet the needs of each other. To succeed, we must use God's Word as our source and be committed to listening and communicating properly.

My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing. (James 1:2-4)

God says to "count it all joy" when you experience trials. Why? Because responding in the right spirit will lead to patience, which leads to a state of being that God calls "lacking nothing." God works in us, but the time it takes to learn depends on our cooperation. Growth comes when you put your faith in Him by learning His will, following it, and having a deep desire to become holy as He is holy.

The Bible says God allows our faith to be tested by trials. It also tells us that God is our Father, if we are in Christ, and that He never condemns us but that He disciplines us for our good. We must view difficulties as God-ordained opportunities to seek instruction, grow in the image of Christ, learn more about our spouse's needs, and become the husband or wife God intends. The word *discipline* simply means "to train."

Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness. Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. (Hebrews 12:9-11)

Have you ever been angry with your spouse? Ever wished your marriage was better, different? Ever blamed your spouse as the primary offender? When you accept the truth that *you* need to change, and that *you* need to apply yourself to meeting your spouse's needs, a surprising thing will happen. Your marriage will improve, and so will your spouse's attitude. This is not about who does more, but about who does right. And God will bless obedience. God is always at work, but we must cooperate, or the growth God desires won't happen.

Being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ. (Philippians 1:6)

This verse includes becoming the husband or wife God desires you to be.

Companionship needs are gender specific. One of man's basic needs is affirmation, while a woman's is to be nurtured and cherished. Awareness of these needs comes through study and communication. If a need is violated and an offense taken, there is a proper way to bring it into discussion. A husband and wife sincerely desiring to stop bad behavior patterns must agree to work through a healing process.

Acknowledge the Offense

The first step in the healing process is to acknowledge the offense. If your wife says or does something that is un-affirming to you, let her know *in a kind way* that it hurt. If your husband says or does something in a non-cherishing or non-nurturing way, let him know *in a kind way* that it hurt.

Apply the Response

Once you have both acknowledged the offense, respond in love using the three Cs.

Confirm

When one spouse says, "That was un-affirming" or "That hurt," the proper response needs to be "I am sorry" or "Help me understand what I did." Responses should always be stated kindly.

Cooperate

Try to understand your spouse's perspective. Learning how to better meet their needs requires listening, *not* arguing, accusing, or debating.

Clarify

In a loving way, explain to your spouse what they said or did and offer positive suggestions or alternatives. Remember, this is an opportunity for both partners to learn and change.

Examples

A husband makes a negative comment about his wife's cooking to the children or a friend, in her presence. His wife takes the earliest opportunity to say to him, *in private*, that his remark really hurt. She clarifies her need by asking him not to joke about her cooking to anyone and then finding out if there is something she might do to improve.

Husband, if something is bothering you, approach it privately and sincerely. Cherish your wife, and you will discover she really wants to please you.

A wife sarcastically disagrees with her husband's perspective on a political issue in front of friends. Later, *when no one else is present*, he tells her that what she did was not affirming to him. He clarifies his need expressing the honest truth that her opinion was argumentative and embarrassed him in public. He proposes a suggestion: "If you have a different opinion on a subject, I am willing to discuss it with you privately, but when you disagree or challenge me in front of others, it is un-affirming to me."

Everyone is different. Plug in the issues that push your buttons, and come up with your own suggestions. And remember, this is not an opportunity to bring up past things your spouse has done to upset you. Philippians 2:3 says we are not to act out of "selfish ambition or conceit," but we are to "consider others as more important" than ourselves (HCSB). This means your primary concern is learning your spouse's needs and how to meet them.

Preference versus Truth

A *preference* indicates what one prefers before or above another. It is neither right nor wrong, but personal preference. Can personal preferences be wrong? Yes. If your personal preference is contrary to the Word and will of God, it is sin and wrong.

Examples of simple preferences include cuisine, cars, homes, decorating, pets, clothing, music, entertainment, vacation destinations, and much more. What about the up and down drama of the toilet seat? Preference.

Preference requires compromise, which is the difference between preference and truth. Where truth is concerned, there is cooperation, but no compromise. *Compromise* means "to settle differences by mutual concessions." What we know to be God's Word, or will, is truth, and no concessions apply, only obedience.

Truth is what the Word of God says to do or not do, what is right and what is wrong behavior.

You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you.
(Deuteronomy 4:2)

Preferences that may violate God's truth can include entertainment (movies, TV, music), selfish sexual desires, manner of dress, friendships, child rearing methods, church attendance, and more. For example, a wife or husband may choose a friend that is inappropriate or is dragging them into sinful activities. One partner may desire sexually explicit films. A man may desire sex weekly, but his wife sticks to her once-a-month preference. A mother may insist on taking the lead in child discipline and ignore her husband's input. When these types of conflicts arise, a married couple needs to look to God's Word and seek godly counsel.

Two Wrongs Never Make a Right

What if you find that all or most of the effort is coming from you? So be it. Is it right for you to

enter into sin and disobedience because the situation seems unfair? No. If we put conditions on our obedience to God, can we expect Him to intercede, help, and bless us? The motive behind blessing your spouse and learning how to meet their companionship needs is your love for Jesus and your desire to glorify and please Him. As Christians, our power, comfort, significance, security, joy, peace, and hope come from God as we walk in obedience.

We all have failed each other, and will fail again, sometimes by choice and sometimes in ignorance. This is precisely why forgiveness is essential. Every person is called by God to practice forgiveness, both by giving it and asking for it.

Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. (1 Corinthians 13:4-7)

When an opportunity arises, follow these five simple steps.

1. **Self-Examination:** When you feel pain that you believe was caused by your spouse, examine your own heart. Ask yourself if this is truly a failure to meet your companionship need or if you just want your own way. Use *Appendix H: Husband's Needs* or *Appendix K: Wife's Needs* as necessary to determine your needs.
2. **Identification:** Be able to communicate exactly what was said or done by your spouse that was unloving, un-affirming, or not cherishing or nurturing.
3. **Communication:** Pick a good time to lovingly bring the offense to your spouse's attention, then say, "I do not feel affirmed when you ____" or "I do not feel cherished when you ____." Be completely open for communication and clarification, not denial or debate.
4. **Clarification:** Propose a clear action plan so your spouse knows what hurt you and what they can do differently to meet your companionship need in this area or situation.
5. **Forgiveness:** Showing grace and forgiveness toward each other in these learning opportunities is important. It is our sin nature and the devil's desire that we focus on the other person's sin, not our own, and justify an agitated, harsh, or sinful response to them when they blow it. Remember, two sins never make *anything* right.

Appendix M

Common Stumbling Blocks

The Bible reveals some common reasons men do not lead as God desires and why women do not affirm their husbands. A stumbling block, or stronghold, can be one or more of the issues listed below. If the Lord speaks to you in any of these areas, confess it and ask Him to strengthen you to be obedient to His will. Write your confessions and prayers in the space provided for each area.

Reason 1: Unforgiveness

Has God brought someone to mind who you need to forgive?

For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. (Matthew 6:14-15)

Forgiveness does not mean:

- the offender agrees what they did was wrong,
- the offender asks for your forgiveness,
- the offender accepts your forgiveness, or
- the relationship has to be or will be restored.

Reason 2: Deception

Satan tempts us to disobey Christ and doubt who we are in Him.

For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. (2 Corinthians 10:4-5)

Satan uses three common tactics against us.

1. Lies, so we doubt the promises of God

You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it. (John 8:44)

2. Condemnation or accusations against others or ourselves

So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.

Then I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, "Now salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God day and night, has been cast down." (Revelation 12:9–10)

3. Bringing up our past, obscuring who we are in Christ

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not [a]imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation.

Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God. For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. (2 Corinthians 5:17–21)

Reason 3: Persecution

As you and your spouse work toward making these changes, are you ready and willing to accept suffering as part of God's perfect plan for your life?

Through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us. (Romans 5:2–5)

For what credit is it if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently?
But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable
before God. For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving
us an example, that you should follow His steps. (1 Peter 2:20–21)

Reason 4: Selfishness

Remember it is not our way, but His. Not our timing, but His. Press on.

[Love] does not seek its own. (1 Corinthians 13:5)

Then He said to them all, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself,
and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.” (Luke 9:23)

If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children,
brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple.
(Luke 14:26)

Satan desires to derail your focus from the priorities of God to things *not* of God—past failures,
the world’s temptations, or your selfish wants.

God Tests and Refines Us

But as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, even so we
speak, not as pleasing men, but God who tests our hearts. (1 Thessalonians 2:4)

He will sit as a refiner and a purifier of silver;
He will purify the sons of Levi,
And purge them as gold and silver,
That they may offer to the Lord
An offering in righteousness. (Malachi 3:3)

God tells us that He tests our hearts and will refine us through purification. This is a process, not a one-time event. As His testing reveals the sin in us, He desires that we would confess to Him and commit ourselves to abiding in Him daily, denying our sinful ways and following Him.

Our part is to be in His Word, and to humbly come in prayer, asking for transformation into the image of Christ. As we walk in obedience, He will do the work so we can glorify Him. God does not say we are perfect because we do everything perfectly, but we are perfect when we walk with a heart perfectly fixed on Him.

I will walk within my house with a perfect heart. (Psalm 101:2)

A “perfect heart” is a heart firmly directed toward God and motivated by love to walk in a manner pleasing to Him in all our ways. In this we glorify Him. Write a prayer asking the Lord for a “perfect heart” to walk within your home as He desires.

Read the verses below and answer the following questions.

Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.

But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins.

Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble; for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. (2 Peter 1:2–11)

Consider these additional verses: Psalms 73:23–24; 91:1–2; 103:8–18; Proverbs 3:5–6; Matthew 11:28–30; Romans 8:28–39; 1 Corinthians 10:13; 2 Corinthians 5:17; 9:8; Ephesians 6:10–12; Philippians 4:6–7; Titus 3:4–6; James 1:2–4; 1 Peter 5:6–7.

Do you believe God has given you “exceedingly great and precious promises”? List them.

By His divine nature, we are courageous, victorious, and able to do His will. We can become the leaders, husbands, fathers, wives, and mothers He has called us to be.

I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. (Philippians 4:13)

It is not by our power, for there is nothing good in us.

I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. (John 15:5)

It is only by His grace that we succeed.

Jesus said to them again, “Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you.”
(John 20:21)

Identify where we get our strength, how we appropriate that strength, and the result. If God gives us all we need, what does He want us to do with it?

Be patient. Do not be discouraged. Commit yourself daily to being transformed into the image of Christ by God’s Word and His Spirit. Take responsibility when you fail. Then stand firmly in His will and watch what God does in your life.

Appendix P

Trust and Forgiveness

Psalm 139 teaches that God knows each of us intimately, that all our acts and thoughts are known to Him even before they are known to us. Before you opened your heart to God, by accepting Jesus as Lord and Savior, He knew you would come. God is not willing that any should perish; however, through the exercise of free will, He gives every individual the freedom to reject Him.

Trusting God with Our Past and Trials

All the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing,
But He does according to His will in the host of heaven
And among the inhabitants of the earth;
And no one can ward off His hand
Or say to Him, “What have You done?” (Daniel 4:35 NASB)

You have searched me and known me.
You know when I sit down and when I rise up;
You understand my thought from afar.
You scrutinize my path and my lying down,
And are intimately acquainted with all my ways.
Even before there is a word on my tongue,
Behold, O Lord, You know it all. (Psalm 139:1–4 NASB)

FACT FILE

Sovereign—Possessing supreme power, unlimited wisdom, and absolute authority.

God created Adam and Eve, and He gave only one restriction: do not eat of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. But they were deceived by Satan and, in disobedience, chose to eat the fruit of that tree. This brought the curse of sin on all mankind. In Adam, God gave mankind the freedom to choose good, but he turned to evil. Therefore all who now choose to be reborn as God’s children, by faith in Christ, still live in a fallen world and are touched by the evil around them. If God shielded His children from all trouble and evil, people would only be motivated to turn to Him for the guarantee of an easy life. This very argument began the historic show down in heaven between God and Satan concerning the life of Job.

Then Satan answered the Lord, “Does Job fear God for nothing? Have You not made a hedge about him and his house and all that he has, on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. But put forth Your hand now and touch all that he has; he will surely curse You to Your face.” (Job 1:9–11 NASB)

God allowed Satan to test Job’s faith through the loss of his possessions, his children, and finally his health. God is a loving Father and does not bring evil into our lives; however, for His purpose and for our ultimate good, He allows us to be touched by trials. Job continued to trust God throughout his suffering, which ultimately resulted in a deeper, more intimate relationship with his creator and complete restoration of blessing.

Job questioned why God was allowing him to suffer. God had declared Job a righteous man in Job 2:3, so he asked why. For several chapters, he agonized over the reason for his trials. God never answered directly but turned Job's attention to His power and glory, which is displayed in creation. Job's search was eventually satisfied through deeper understanding of the greatness of God. Just like Job, when we experience trials, we look for an explanation. And so it is with our marriages and the trials that seem so overwhelming. One of the many lessons we can learn from Job is that *why* is the wrong question. We should instead ask God *what*.

What Are You Trying to Teach Me?

What is Your will for me in this season of suffering?

Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust.
(James 1:13–14 NASB)

Then Job answered the Lord and said,
"I know that You can do all things,
And that no purpose of Yours can be thwarted. . . .
I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear;
But now my eye sees You." (Job 42:1–2, 5 NASB)

Is any of part of your life beyond God's power, wisdom, or authority? Why or why not?

What circumstance in your life did God not know beforehand that you would face?

In Him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will.
(Ephesians 1:11 NIV)

How should you respond to disappointments, difficulties, suffering, and trials?

If God knew all that would happen before we were born, then it follows that, through His foreknowledge, we were predestined through His grace to live the life given to us. God does not keep trials or evil from touching us, or prevent our bad choices, but He does promise to work all for good in the life of those who are committed to Him.

And we know that God causes all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son. (Romans 8:28–29 NASB)

You can choose to either harbor bitterness toward parents who disappointed you, a spouse who deserted you, friends who failed you, or a drunk driver who killed a loved one. Or we can place our faith in a sovereign God.

When we come to Christ, we trust God with our eternal destiny. We must also trust Him with our past and present circumstances. Christ can comfort and strengthen us both in and through our trials and can bring good out of bad. It is only through our faith and obedience that God can and will give us peace and bring praise, honor, and glory to our Lord Jesus Christ.

Describe what these verses mean and how they can be applied to your personal circumstances.

In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. (1 Peter 1:6–7 NASB)

Our Trials and Tribulations

God's word teaches that trials and tribulations are part of the Christian life.

These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world. (John 16:33)

Jesus tells us that we can have peace and that He has overcome the world, but amid trials we ask, "Why? What is God's purpose?" Just as the refiner places crude gold into a crucible and administers heat to bring dross (impurity) to the surface, God allows His beloved children to go into the crucible of suffering to be refined and transformed into the image of our Redeemer, Jesus Christ.

He will sit as a smelter and purifier of silver, and He will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, so that they may present to the Lord offerings in righteousness. (Malachi 3:3 NASB)

If we trust ourselves to God's goodness and purpose, our hearts will become permeated with the love, hope, and confidence of Jesus Christ. Others will see the righteousness of Jesus Christ being worked out in us.

Remember Romans 8:28–29? God does not say *some* things work together for good, but *all things*. The key is faith. If we choose to believe God's promises and trust Him in all our trials and tribulations, we will be victorious, and God will be glorified. In this passage, "to those who love God" refers to those who have received Jesus as Lord and Savior, which includes an understanding that God's purpose in this life is to deliver us from the power of sin, which translates to becoming one who is able to choose righteousness over evil, glory to God.

But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and manifests through us the sweet aroma of the knowledge of Him in every place.
(2 Corinthians 2:14 NASB)

Are you willing to trust God with the trials and challenges in your life? ___ Yes ___ No

Are you willing to allow God to transform your life through these trials? ___ Yes ___ No

Are you willing to trust God as you work through these hurts and trials in your life?
___ Yes ___ No

There are times, says Jesus, when God cannot lift the darkness from you, but trust Him. God will appear like an unkind friend, but He is not; He will appear like an unnatural Father, but He is not; He will appear like an unjust judge, but He is not. Keep the notion of the mind of God behind all things strong and growing. Nothing happens in any particular unless God's will is behind it, therefore you can rest in perfect confidence in Him. —Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest*

The Cost of Unforgiveness

When a debt is forgiven, the right to payment is given away. The word *forgive* literally means "to give away." If someone injures me and I forgive them, I give away the freedom to continue being angry and resentful. This breaks many strongholds that lead to emotional and psychological problems. Forgiving someone means giving our hurts to God, letting Him take them away from us. In this way we give away any resentful thoughts we may have and eliminate acts of retribution.

As God pardons us, we give a pardon for the offense. God commands that we forgive others as He has forgiven us. The word *pardon* is derived from Latin, *perdonare*, meaning "to grant freely." True forgiveness is undeserved, unmerited, and free. It is not our place to decide what is just or fair—we are called to forgive. In Scripture, to *forget* means "to let go from one's power."

When we refuse to grant forgiveness, there is a price to pay. Unforgiveness, being unwilling to let go of offenses when we believe another person has wronged us, results in a negative emotional condition. The most common is resentment, which means "to feel again." Resentment clings to past hurts, reliving them over and over. Resentment, like picking a scab, prohibits our emotional wounds from healing.

See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled. (Hebrews 12:15 NASB)

Bitterness is like a deep root taking hold in the human heart, which then grows and produces fruit. However, rather than nourishing others, this bitter fruit defiles both us and others.

Most people do not readily admit to harboring unforgiveness, resentment, or bitterness because they only recognize it as a logical emotional response after being hurt. They see their condition as justified and seek others to listen to their complaints or sympathize with them. Ephesians teaches that there will be undeniable evidence in an individual's life that the bitter tree of resentment is growing within their heart.

Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. (Ephesians 4:31 NASB)

Are any of these common in your life?

- Pride
- Self-righteousness
- Self-pity
- Emotional disturbances
- Anxiety, tension, or stress
- Health problems
- Eating disorders
- Unhealthy sense of self-confidence
- Lack of trust in relationships
- Lack of intimacy in marriage
- Sexual dysfunction
- Judgmental or critical of others
- Ultrasensitive and easily offended
- Absence of peace or joy
- Feeling distant from Jesus
- Afraid to lead as a husband
- Afraid to follow as a wife

FACT FILE

Wrath—An outburst of a strong, vengeful anger or indignation, seeking retribution.

Anger—A state of mind marked by fretfulness and reacting to life's challenges with frustration.

Evil speaking—Unkind words, verbal abuse against someone, clamor, slander, wounding someone's reputation by evil reports, backbiting, insult, and defamation.

Malice—Hateful feelings we nurture in our hearts. A desire to see another suffer or to separate ourselves from that person, not wanting to work toward reconciliation.

Why Forgive?

Along with the emotional and social devastation that results from unforgiveness, we are indebted to forgive.

God commands it.

Obedience to God is not optional. Deciding when we will and will not obey His commands leads to an unfruitful, ineffective, and spiritually barren life.

But love your enemies, and do good . . . and you will be sons of the Most High; for He Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil men. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. (Luke 6:35–36 NASB)

And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses. (Mark 11:25)

In forgiving, we bear the image of Jesus.

As Christians, we are called to carry the name of Christ to a lost world. The term *Christian* means “little Christ.” Christ demonstrated forgiveness, came to this earth, died to establish forgiveness for the guilty, and commissioned the church to proclaim forgiveness. To bear His image we must be willing to forgive others as He forgives us.

Then Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.”
(Luke 23:34)

The one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked. (1 John 2:6 NASB)

Forgiveness breaks the cycle of pain, blame, and strongholds.

Forgiveness brings healing to a hurting person and functions as an antidote to the poison of bitterness. However, it does not address all issues of blame and fairness but often disregards those altogether. The hurt and resentment is left behind with God, while obediently offering forgiveness brings freedom and enables one to start over in a relationship.

This truth is demonstrated in the life of Joseph, found in Genesis 37–45. Betrayed by his brothers and sold into slavery, he refused to allow the root of bitterness to take hold in his life. After years of separation, when the family was reunited, Joseph testified of the healing work God had done in his life through forgiveness, demonstrated by the names of his sons.

Joseph named the firstborn Manasseh, “For,” he said, “God has made me forget all my trouble and all my father’s household.” He named the second Ephraim, “For,” he said, “God has made me fruitful in the land of my affliction.”
(Genesis 41:51–52 NASB)

In this passage, *forget* does not mean cease to remember. It means “to let go,” or cease to let hurts control present life. Joseph’s fruitfulness was directly related to putting his trust in God’s sovereignty and forgiving others. Instead of multiplying his hurt by feeling it again and again (resentment), Joseph chose to trust God as the overseer of all events in his life.

Unforgiveness imprisons us in the past and locks out all potential for a fruitful life.

During Joseph’s years in Egypt, he allowed God to heal a heart that had been broken by his own brothers. Later, when given the opportunity, he demonstrated his healing through acts of love, forgiveness, and grace to his brothers.

Now do not be grieved or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life . . . and to keep you alive by a great deliverance. . . . He kissed all his brothers and wept on them, and afterward his brothers talked with him. (Genesis 45:5, 6, 15 NASB)

There was no blaming and no explanation demanded, only the voice of mercy and forgiveness. The way was cleared for Joseph and his brothers to be reunited and begin a new relationship.

Forgiveness loosens the stranglehold of guilt in the offender.

In the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. (Ephesians 2:7 NASB)

Forgiveness brings freedom to all involved. God set Joseph free, but his brothers would have carried their grief to the grave if Joseph had not forgiven them. We forgive because God forgives us in Christ. That same forgiveness, undeserved and unearned, is what we owe to others. It relieves the oppressive burden we know as guilt.

If Jesus had not extended kindness and forgiveness to sinners, we would all forever exist in the stranglehold of guilt. He made the first move toward us, which made it possible for us to be reconciled to Him.

Reconciliation

Reconciliation is the removal of enmity, the resolution of a quarrel. It implies that the parties being reconciled were formerly hostile to or separated from one another. Any successful reconciliation will be accompanied by kindness and peace rather than anger and turmoil.

FACT FILE

Reconcile—To restore to a right relationship, to settle or resolve differences.

Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you. (Ephesians 4:31–32 NASB)

Reconciliation is to be sought out for family members and other believers in our lives. In all our relationships outside our immediate family setting, respectful boundaries and maintaining a healthy relationship are important.

However there are some cases or situations where reconciliation is not necessary, possible, or even needed, such as an emotionally or physically abusive parent or ex-spouse or a random person who hurt you or a loved one (a rapist, a drunk who hurt or killed a loved one, an old teacher or coach who verbally hurt you, etc.).

Scripture instructs us to put away all bitterness, to be kind, tenderhearted, and forgiving.

How do we put away bitterness?

How do we reconcile with someone whom we have offended?

How do we repair the hurt we have caused others?

How do we forgive someone who has offended us?

How can we change our own feelings about a wrong done?

If You Need to Be Forgiven

As an act of the will, you must do four things.

First, confess your sin to God, ask Him to forgive you, and ask His Holy Spirit to fill your heart with His love.

Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven,
Whose sin is covered. . . .
When I kept silent, my bones grew old
Through my groaning all the day long.
For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me;
My vitality was turned into the drought of summer.
I acknowledged my sin to You,
And my iniquity I have not hidden.
I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord,"
And You forgave the iniquity of my sin. (Psalm 32:1, 3–5)

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:9)

As far as the east is from the west,
So far has He removed our transgressions from us. (Psalm 103:12)

Take a moment right now and cry out to God. Ask Him to forgive you, to fill you with His Holy Spirit, and strengthen you to obey.

God alone forgives sins. He forgives and He forgets. By faith, accept God's absolute forgiveness and cleansing.

Forgiveness is not an emotion. . . . Forgiveness is an act of the will, and the will can function regardless of the temperature of the heart. —Corrie ten Boom

Second, if possible, go to those you have wronged, humbly make confession, and ask for their forgiveness.

Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.
(Matthew 5:23–24)

Write your commitment to obey Matthew 5:23–24.

Write the names and a brief description of what needs to be said for forgiveness.

Six of the most powerful words in the English language are, *I was wrong. Please forgive me.*

Don't let distractions or other obstacles delay this act of obedience. Share your decision with a trustworthy Christian friend, asking them to pray with you and hold you accountable to follow through on this commitment. It is best to seek forgiveness face to face. However, due to logistics or a possible confrontation, you may need to communicate on the phone or in writing. If the person you have wronged has passed away, simply go to God with your confession.

Third, spend time daily with the Lord in His Word and in prayer.

One of the many negative consequences of not seeking or giving forgiveness is a hindered relationship with God. Praise the Lord that He never leaves us or forsakes us, but our own hearts can grow cold and distant, thus affecting our intimacy with Him. God designed this consequence to motivate us to practice forgiveness.

But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. (Matthew 6:33)

Write your decision to spend time daily with God by reading His Word and in prayer and meditation.

Fourth, ponder the meaning of the cross and the sacrifice Jesus made for your sins.

For we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another. But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit.
(Titus 3:3-5)

Take a moment right now to thank Jesus for all He has done for you, for forgiving you for all your sins, for His perfect plan of transforming you into His image, and for the gift of His Holy Spirit.

If You Need to Forgive

As an act of the will, you must do two things.

First, pray and ask God for the strength to obey and to forgive.

Jesus answered and said to them, "Assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith and do not doubt . . . if you say to this mountain, 'Be removed and be cast into the sea,' it will be done." (Matthew 21:21)

God promised to give us the strength to move mountains. This may be your Mount Everest!

Whenever I see myself before God and realize something of what my blessed Lord has done for me at Calvary, I am ready to forgive anybody anything, I cannot withhold it. I do not even want to withhold it. —Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones

We know it is God's will that we forgive others. Be confident that when you ask for this strength, it will be granted.

Second, communicate your forgiveness to the person or persons.

Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. (1 John 5:14)

Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another. (Romans 14:19)

Desiring Reconciliation

In Matthew, the Lord Jesus was asked an important question. “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the law?” (Matthew 22:36). His response revealed an essential truth: “Jesus said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.” This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.” (Matthew 22:37–40). Jesus Himself said our love for others is equally as important as our love for Him.

We want God to forgive us, and we ask for this regularly and depend on it. God shows His love to us, and we are to respond by first loving Him and then loving others. This verse is *not* encouraging a love that would put us in conflict with God’s desires or will for us, but it says that all love we show toward others should be within the scope of our obedience to Him. We must not put our own desires or the desire to satisfy others above our obedience to God.

But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, “Raca!” shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, “You fool!” shall be in danger of hell fire.
(Matthew 5:22)

Let’s bring some clarity to the words in this verse. To be “angry with his brother” means treating someone in thought, word, or deed in an unloving way. Even believers treat loved ones in an unloving way and excuse it rather than seek reconciliation.

The word *raca* means “to hold someone in contempt, judge, or believe them to be worthless or less than yourself in some way.” The word *fool* means “one who is morally worthless and undeserving of salvation.” These are serious charges that many believers are aiming at others for one reason or another. The Lord says, “For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s” (1 Corinthians 6:20).

We are to glorify or *reflect* Christ to all with no exception. Lingering thoughts or behaviors toward others that are unloving or not Christlike are inexcusable and require repentance both toward God and the person.

Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.
(Matthew 5:23–24)

When do we go to the altar? This refers to our fellowship with Jesus, our time in prayer and thanksgiving and asking petitions of Him, our daily acts of devotion and desire to abide in Him.

I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. (John 15:5)

To abide means “to dwell with, to live in a constant awareness of being the temple of the Holy Spirit.” And it says that *if* we do it, we will bear much fruit; for without His grace we can do *nothing*. *Going to the altar* refers to our fellowship with Jesus and our ability to receive the grace necessary for bearing fruit and obeying His will.

Examining Ourselves

When we owe someone forgiveness, either by the asking or giving, God says we first must clear this up before we can expect His blessing and grace. What are the *gifts* to bring in Matthew 5:23? Bringing sacrifices to the temple was a common practice for the Jews as part of atoning for their sins. Our gifts today are praise, tithes, worship, obedience, and service to Him. Yet Jesus said He will not receive these gifts if you owe anyone reconciliation.

Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams. (1 Samuel 15:22)

Service and work for God will not fix this problem. We are exhorted to examine ourselves before we take communion.

For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death till He comes. Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord’s body. For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep. For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world. (1 Corinthians 11:26–32)

How often do Christians partake of communion without first examining their hearts to see if they are harboring bitterness or have sinned against someone and have not repented or do not plan to be reconciled?

Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law.
(Romans 13:8)

FACT FILE

Reconcile—To make things right; to change one’s feelings or perspective toward another; or to pay a debt owed.

A Debt Owed

As Christians we have a debt to pay that God Himself says we owe to others: to love them in thought, word, and deed. This also includes forgiving those who have hurt us. Many Christians are harboring bitterness, resentment, or unforgiveness toward someone and justifying these feelings because this person has not yet paid any consequence or taken responsibility for their behavior. But we *will* be hurt by others, even those who are supposed to love us, either ignorantly or deliberately.

The word *forgive* is a verb—an *action*. God is using His Word to speak to you right now, revealing truth that requires action. Forgiving is not easy. It can help to seek the support and accountability of a mature Christian to encourage you to follow through.

Write your commitment to forgive the person or persons or to ask for forgiveness for what God revealed to you. Give yourself a deadline to follow through.

For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.
(Matthew 6:14)

In some cases, due to logistics, cost of travel, safety to you, or the ability of the other person to be quiet long enough to let you say what you need to say, a letter, email, text, or phone call may be the best option.

Communication Reminders

Keep these points in mind when either speaking or communicating in writing.

1. You are doing this out of obedience to your heavenly Father, who loves and cares for you.
2. He wants you to be free from the bondage and oppression you have been experiencing as a result of unforgiveness.
3. You do not need to rehearse every detail of their offense against you.
4. Many times, especially when forgiving a spouse, they may be unaware of what they have done to hurt you.
5. Do not compel others to admit their offenses.
6. God has called you to obey, not to be a prosecuting attorney, jury, judge, or to try and make them confess that what they did was wrong.
7. Keep it short.

8. In many cases, due to the high level of emotion, we can find ourselves saying things we didn't intend to say and undermine the purpose of the meeting, conversation, or letter.
9. Finally (if applicable), ask forgiveness for harboring bitterness toward them.
10. Remember that what they may have done was wrong and offensive, but bitterness and unforgiveness are equally wrong.

God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my gospel.
(Romans 2:16)

Therefore you are inexcusable, O man, whoever you are who judge, for in whatever you judge another you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things. (Romans 2:1)

The degree to which I am able and willing to forgive others is a clear indication of the extent to which I have personally experienced God my Father's forgiveness for me. —Phillip Keller

Maintaining Your Commitment to Forgive

You may encounter a battle between the Spirit and the flesh after you have asked for forgiveness or have forgiven another person.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another. (Galatians 5:22–26)

The forgiveness experience will change you and your relationships over time. God has had a major victory in your life, bringing you to this place of surrender and obedience. But this is only the beginning. Now you must press in and work through the needed changes. This will require that you seek God daily for His strength to continue on your path of mercy and compassion.

For example, you might have forgiven a parent for being harsh and unloving and asked them to forgive you for harboring bitterness. Yet they may continue to be harsh and unloving. Your flesh may want to react the way you formerly reacted. God will be faithful to produce His fruit in your life as you surrender to Him moment by moment.

For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. (Ephesians 6:12)

You must keep in mind that your obedience in forgiving was not so your spouse (or the other person) would change. If they surrender their will to the Lord, they will experience God's grace, healing, and the ability to change. Only God can change our hearts and renew our minds, but it will only happen as we surrender to Him.

We are involved in a spiritual battle every day. The Enemy, Satan, does not want you to obey God or have victory over sin and hurts. He will attack your mind with memories, evil thoughts, lies, temptations, and condemnation. You must exercise mental self-control and remember what and whom you are battling!

“Be angry, and do not sin”: do not let the sun go down on your wrath, nor give place to the devil. (Ephesians 4:26–27)

This is the reality in which we live. Satan hates to lose ground in your life. He wants to rob you of God’s peace and joy.

Satan’s Destruction

Stop giving the devil opportunities to work his destruction in your life. Test each thought that enters your mind by God’s Word to see if it is from Him, from your flesh, or from the Enemy.

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ, and being ready to punish all disobedience when your obedience is fulfilled. (2 Corinthians 10:3–6)

Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things. (Philippians 4:8)

Pray in every temptation, asking for God’s power to do His will.

Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. (Romans 12:21)

Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. (Romans 15:13)

Resist and rebuke the devil in the name of Jesus. *Fight!*

Yet Michael the archangel, in contending with the devil . . . dared not bring against him a reviling accusation, but said, “The Lord rebuke you!” (Jude 1:9)

Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God . . . casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you. . . . Your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith. (1 Peter 5:6–9)

I have forgiven that one for your sakes in the presence of Christ, lest Satan take advantage of us; for we are not ignorant of his devices. (2 Corinthians 2:10–11)

God wants you to be victorious. Be aware of the devil's devices. Unforgiveness is one of his most powerful tactics to keep us in bondage. Jesus showed the importance of using Scripture to combat Satan's deceptions (Matthew 4:4, 7, 10).

Develop an action plan by using any of the verses above, or the many verses in this study, to combat unbiblical thoughts and to set your mind on God's perspective. Write a verse on an index card and memorize it by carrying the card with you and reviewing it in the morning and night. Continue to add to your victory kit by memorizing verses. As you pray over and memorize Scripture, you are hiding God's Word in your heart (Psalm 119:11). This will be your victory.

Quote Scripture to replace evil thoughts, reinforce God's truth, and answer the Enemy as Jesus did. When Satan brought lies to Jesus, He said, "It is written" (Matthew 4:4, 7), and He quoted Scripture. We must do the same. Truth will *always* prevail.

Establishing Boundaries

You may need to establish boundaries. Asking for forgiveness or forgiving another does not give that person the right to treat you with disrespect or be harsh.

If your mother was harsh or manipulative toward you when you were growing up and she continued after you moved out, you need to set boundaries in your relationship (after forgiving her). Kindly explain that you want a relationship with her but need to establish boundaries to not be hurt by her. Perhaps you could add, "Mom, I need you to speak to me in a loving way, and I promise to do the same toward you. If either of us say something unkind, we need to express that the other person hurt us. Or if we wish to not talk about a certain subject, we need to honor that. If those boundaries are not respected, then I will end the discussion. Mom, the only way we can truly know if we desire to have a relationship is by the way we love and respect each other."

Unable to Reconcile

Sometimes it is not possible to reconcile. If the person you need to forgive is deceased or unwilling to reconcile, you can still forgive them.

Bitterness in the human heart lives on long after the object of that bitterness has died. It is important to view forgiveness as a powerful antidote to heal the human soul of unhealthy human conditions. If you choose to trust God and receive this "antidote," God will bring healing and even fill those voids in your soul. The death of the offender does not nullify God's Word.

True, biblical forgiveness requires us to take action. We must do more than agree in our minds or hearts that we should forgive. The Bible does not command us to merely *feel* forgiveness. We must exercise our will and follow through with our actions.

You must begin with confession to the Lord. It is helpful if you speak your confession out loud and verbalize your forgiveness of the deceased person in the presence of a trusted friend, spouse, pastor, or counselor.

FACT FILE

Confess—To acknowledge or disclose one's misdeed, fault, or sin.

Your Responsibility

You are only responsible for *your part* of reconciliation. Regardless of the position your spouse takes (or the other person), you must obey God by asking for forgiveness and giving forgiveness. If they refuse to grant you forgiveness, or they do not acknowledge their wrong toward you, God will still bless you for your obedience and pour out His peace, grace, and mercy upon your life. You will still experience His freedom from bondage.

You cannot place any expectations or requirements on the other person. Surrender all to the Lord and trust Him to work in your circumstances. We must not lean on our own understanding but obey and surrender to God and His will. He has given us spiritual laws to govern, protect, and set us free. His Word gives us understanding and instruction about how to follow these laws. Our flesh, pride, and fear will keep us from trusting and obeying God in these situations, but through the power of the Holy Spirit, we can overcome.

Trust in the Lord with all your heart,
And lean not on your own understanding;
In all your ways acknowledge Him,
And He shall direct your paths. (Proverbs 3:5–6)

Use the following prayer to guide you:

Lord Jesus, I pray for the strength to trust You in these circumstances. Help me to remember that I am doing this for You. I know You alone can heal me and my spouse for the wrong we have done to each other. I pray for reconciliation with my spouse, but I know that I can only do my part. I pray for my spouse to surrender to You that You might be glorified. I trust You entirely with the results. In Jesus's name I pray. Amen.

Conclusion

It can be extremely difficult to forgive, but life is harder when we do not forgive because we are harboring sin and missing out on what Jesus did for us on the cross. Our experience of God's forgiveness is directly related to our ability to forgive others. A readiness to forgive others is one indication that you have truly repented of your own sin, surrendered your life, and received God's forgiveness. A surrendered heart toward God cannot be a hard heart toward others.

Pride and fear keep us from forgiveness and reconciliation. Refusing to give in or be broken, insisting on your rights, and defending yourself are all indications that selfish pride is ruling your life, rather than the Lord. When fear of *what if* is consuming and controlling you, pray for the faith to trust and obey God. Enemies are very expensive to keep. The parable in Matthew 18:21–35 warns that an unforgiving spirit will put you in an emotional prison.

The first and often the only person to be healed by forgiveness is the person who does the forgiving. . . . When we genuinely forgive, we set a prisoner free and then discover that the prisoner we set free was us. —Lewis Smedes

Appendix R

Glossary

These definitions are taken from *Webster's New International Dictionary of the English Language*, G & C Merriam Company, and *The Complete Word Study Dictionary*, Spiros Zodhiates, AMG Publishers.

abide: To stay, remain; to continue in a place; to endure without yielding.

affirm: To confirm; assert as valid; assert positively.

arrogant or proud: To be conceited; feeling or showing self-importance, disregard for others. Proudful; giving oneself high rank, an undue degree of significance.

bears all things: Bears, *stego* (Greek). To hide, to conceal. Love hides the faults of others or covers them up. It keeps out resentment as the ship keeps out the water or the roof the rain.

believing: *Pisteuo* (Greek). Having faith in or to be firmly persuaded in something. It indicates an attitude of expectant hope.

brag: To talk about oneself, or things pertaining to oneself, in a boastful manner; to boast.

companion: One who has accompanied or is in company with another; a spouse, an associate, an interest of some special relationship as a spouse or comrade.

comparable: One who is the counterpart, the other side, a part opposite, a mate, a companion, but not identical.

compromise: To settle differences by mutual consensuses.

correction: God's Word tells us how to restore something to its proper condition, setting upright something that has fallen, pointing to godly living.

defile: *Miano* (Greek). To stain with color as the staining of glass, to tinge, pollute, defile.

discipline: *Hupopiazō* (Greek). Used to describe boxers giving knockout blows; punches to the part of the face right under the eyes until they were black and blue. (Related passages: 1 Timothy 4:7–8; Jude 3; 2 Peter 1:5–6)

divine power: Power, *dunamis* (Greek). Dynamic strength, or ability to do what only God can do.

doctrine: God's divine instruction provides a comprehensive and complete body of divine truth necessary for life, godliness, and family.

edification: *Oikodome* (Greek). To build up for the spiritual profit or advancement of someone else; used to indicate building up a house or structure.

endure all things: To endure, *hupomeno* (Greek). To abide under, to bear up under, suffer, as a load of miseries. Patient acquiescence, holding its ground when it can no longer believe nor hope.

enraptured: *Sagah* (Hebrew). Isaiah used this verb to suggest swerving, meandering, or reeling in drunkenness (Isa. 28:7). Could define intoxication, not only from wine or beer but also from love (Proverbs 5:19–20).

envy: Discontent or uneasiness at the sight of another's excellence or good fortune, accompanied with some degree of hatred and a desire to possess equal advantages; malicious grudging.

expectation: Anticipation or notion of something happening; an expected standard.

forsake: To deny. Daily align our priorities to God's Word, which places His will over ours.

gentle: Seemly, fitting; equitable, fair, moderate, forbearing, not insisting on the letter of the law. Expresses considerateness that looks humanely and reasonably at the facts of a case.

genuineness: *Dokimion* (Greek). Something that has been tested and approved. Used to describe metals that had been through a process to remove all impurities.

glorify: To reflect, to honor, praise, to give esteem or honor by putting Him into an honorable position.

heart: *Kardia* (Greek). The seat of desires, feelings, affections, passions, impulses; the mind.

heart: *Lebab* (Hebrew). Mind, inner person (will, emotions). The word primarily describes the entire disposition of the inner person.

helper: *Azar* (Hebrew). To aid, to support, give encouragement; one who surrounds, protects, and helps another.

helper: *Ezer* (Hebrew). To aid or assistance that is given; indicates persons who give help. The woman created as Adam's complementary helper (Genesis 2:18, 20). The Lord as Israel's help (Hosea 13:9). The Lord as Israel's chief helper (Exodus 18:4; Deuteronomy 33:7; Psalms 33:20; 115:9–11).

helper: One who comes along and assists, not leads.

instruction in righteousness: Scripture provides positive training. *Instruction* originally referred to training a child in godly behavior; not merely rebuke and correction of wrong behavior (Acts 20:32; 1 Timothy 4:6; 1 Peter 2:1–2).

kind: *Chrestos* (Greek). To do good; denotes being gentle, merciful, sympathetic, gracious, and good natured in contrast to harsh, hard, sharp, bitter, or cruel. The idea of moral excellence.

knowledge: *Epignosis* (Greek). Thorough participation in acquiring knowledge, and applying it.

longsuffering or patience: To be long-tempered, the opposite of hasty anger; involves exercising understanding and patience toward people. Requires that we endure circumstances, not losing faith or giving up.

love: *Agape* (Greek). The response of God's heart toward unworthy sinners. Agape is God's love demonstrated in self-sacrifice for the benefit of the objects of His love, His Son bringing forgiveness to man. God's essential quality seeks the best interests of others regardless of the others' actions; it involves God doing what He knows is best for man and not necessarily what man desires. Agape is choosing to love unconditionally.

love: *Phileo* (Greek). The response of the human spirit to what appeals to it as pleasurable. Distinct from agape and speaks of esteem, high regard, and tender affection and is more emotional. Friendship love; determined by the pleasure that one receives from the object of that love. Phileo is conditional love.

meditate: To moan, utter, or growl muttering sounds, like reading half aloud or conversing with oneself, interacting with the text so it would soak into your mind. As a tea bag soaking in water permeates the liquid, so meditating on Scripture permeates our minds. In the biblical world, meditation was not a silent practice.

minister (noun): A servant or waiter; one who oversees, governs, and fulfills.

minister (verb): To adjust, regulate, and set in order; to serve, render service to another; to labor for the Lord as a servant.

not rejoicing in unrighteousness (iniquity): When you see someone fall into sin or make a mistake, you are not happy or vindictive toward them.

perfected: *Teleio* (Greek). To make complete, which indicates that something is in process. Particularly with the meaning to bring to a full end, completion, reaching the intended goal, to finish a work or duty.

preference: What one prefers before or above another. Neither right nor wrong.

provide: *Pronoeo* (Greek). To give careful thought to, take thought for, take into consideration, have regard for, to think about beforehand in a solicitous manner, to care for in providing for someone else.

purpose: An intended or desired result or goal.

react: To act in response to a stimulant or to stimulus, to act in opposition.

reacting in the flesh: A Christian reacting to a situation in a sinful manner, in the habit of their old fallen nature, or reacting in their strength and understanding rather than the power and wisdom of the Holy Spirit.

rejoicing in the truth: Having great joy; rejoicing at what is true based on God's promises.

repent: To resolve; to amend one's life as a result of contrition for one's sins; to feel regret for what one has done or omitted to do before God. To turn around and go another direction; to change one's mind, will, and life, resulting in a change of behavior; to do things another way.

reproof: God's Word tells us what is wrong or sinful in belief and behavior.

respond: React positively or favorably.

responding in love: Responding with the inward guidance, love, wisdom, and power of the Holy Spirit.

rightly dividing: Cutting something straight as you would in carpentry, masonry, or with cutting a piece of cloth to be sewn together.

rude: Characterized by roughness; harsh, severe, ugly, indecent, or offensive in manner or action.

satisfy: *Rawah* (Hebrew). To give water, to drench; to drink one's fill. It refers to giving someone a drink literally and figuratively (Psalms 36:8-9; 65:10-11). It means to drink all one wants, to satisfy (Proverbs 5:19; 7:18).

security: The state of being free from danger or threat, having confidence that one is secure, and that one's well-being is assured by another, as in a wife resting securely in the husband's leadership.

seek and set your mind: Imperative verbs indicating the action is a continual process. *Seek* means to look for and strive to find. *Set your mind* refers to the will, affections, and conscience.

seek first: A command to do and never stop (Matthew 6:33).

seek your own way: Pursuing what best fits your own interests without any concern of how your actions or ways affect others. Unwilling to receive input, which includes instruction from God's perspective or your spouse.

study: Imperative verb; a command to do and to continue to do. Denotes a zealous persistence, to be diligent, to make every effort to do one's best, to be eager and earnest in accomplishing a goal.

submit: *Hupotasso* (Greek). A voluntary attitude of giving in, cooperating, assuming responsibility, and carrying a burden.

thinks no evil: *Logizomai* (Greek). Used as an accounting term, meaning to put things together in one's mind, to count or add up, to occupy oneself with calculations.

thoroughly equipped for every good work: God intends for us to understand His will and be empowered to follow through in obedience by following the biblical principles in His Word.

transformed: *Metamorphoó* (Greek). From which we derive the word *metamorphosis*. To change into something entirely different, as a caterpillar to a butterfly.

truth: Comes from the Word of God; makes clear what is right and wrong.

workmanship: *Poiema* (Greek). From which we derive the word *poem*. To make something; a work, workpiece, workmanship, or masterpiece.

Endnotes

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About the Author

A fool. A student with dyslexia. A high school graduate with a third-grade reading level. An ignorant husband and abusive father. All described Pastor Craig Caster at one time in his life, but God had a different plan for him. Despite Craig's fear of public speaking, God called him to full-time ministry in 1994. He stepped out in faith without formal education or a seminary degree. He was ordained in 1995 and has since written four books; disciplined many men; counseled hundreds; led countless to Christ; and taught thousands through marriage and parenting seminars, men's retreats, and pastors' conferences throughout the US and internationally. All by the grace and power of God.

Although Craig gave His life to Jesus in 1979, his transformation started when he began to abide in Jesus and His Word daily. He truly believes Jesus desires a close relationship with each one of us. His life is forever changed because he pursues this relationship and is completely dependent on Christ.

Be Encouraged

If you are struggling to trust that God can work in and through your life, be encouraged by Pastor Craig's story. Don't let your past sins, learning disabilities, fear of teaching or speaking, or lack of education stop you from being obedient to the call of God on your life. God desires to make you His disciple, and if you are married or have children, He wants to form you into a spouse and parent who honors Him. His grace is amazing and limitless. He loves you and desires to be glorified through you.

God's Promise to You

Thanks be to God for His abundant promises and provision. Meditate on His promises from the words of "Simon Peter, a bondservant and apostle of Jesus Christ."

To those who have obtained like precious faith with us by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ:

Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.

But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. (2 Peter 1:1-8)

About Family Discipleship Ministries

Family Discipleship Ministries (FDM), a nonprofit ministry established in 1994 by founder and director Pastor Craig Caster, strives to support, educate, and train the body of Christ to minister to families. To accomplish this goal, FDM offers workbooks, supporting videos, and online materials for individual study, small groups, home-group study, and one-on-one discipleship. They conduct seminars on marriage, parenting, understanding teens, and church discipleship planning.

FDM's ministry goal is to exhort, train, and equip leaders of Christian churches to develop a vision for discipleship and provide biblically solid workbooks to help them minister to their church families. Since 1995, thousands of people have completed the marriage and parenting classes, and hundreds of churches within the US and abroad have ministered to their congregations using FDM materials. Their ministry also helps many families through free online resources found at FDM.world.

FDM actively ministers internationally in countries such as Russia, Ukraine, Cuba, Mexico, Africa, Singapore, Japan, and China. Find out more at FDM.world.