

MARRIAGE IS A MINISTRY SERIES

Craig Caster



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in the *Marriage Is a Ministry* series.

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Godly Leadership

Marriage Is a Ministry Series
Volume 5

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)

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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

Leading God's Way

The Bible defines men's God-given responsibility on this earth as "caretaker" or "tender" (Genesis 2:15). Men are specifically called to be leaders and to lead in a godly fashion according to His instruction and plan. Women are a vital part of this responsibility as a helpmate, both encouraging and affirming the man in this area. A wife must believe that her help is essential, to understand that her husband needs her continuous support to become the godly leader God has ordained him to be. A wife can be a tool in the hand of God, designed to work with her husband to build a godly family.

Wife, there is power in intercessional prayer. Learn these things about your husband so you can intercede in prayer for him. But this is not for you to become his "holy spirit" and remind him daily of what he should be doing as a leader. Instead, use this knowledge to know how to pray for him.

ACTION PLAN

Husband, write your commitment to God in this area and ask God for His grace to be faithful.

Wife, write your commitment to intercede in prayer for your husband in this area and ask God for His grace to be faithful.

Skills to Master

God's Word is full of illustrations that are helpful to learning, which Jesus often used during His ministry. Consider the blessed responsibility of helping a child get a driver's license. You may snicker at this memory, perhaps of doing it with your child or even recalling your own experiences as a new driver. There are many skills to master in life, and some are more natural to us than others. Just as some people approach driving with confidence and skill, others not so much.

Since I enjoy motorcycles so much, I had my oldest son, Nicholas, on a four-wheel motorcycle before he was four years old. He grasped the concept of throttle control and maneuvering early on, so when it came to driving cars, merging into traffic, signaling, and all that, he was a natural. With my son Justin, it was a different story. Justin did not enjoy motorcycles, so he was inexperienced when he entered driver's training school. His first practice drive was with mom, which was the last one with her. She told me, "Honey, I'm never going to do that again."

It became my responsibility to come home early and accompany Justin in this training. I will never forget riding with him and thinking that he just was not getting it. The first time he entered the freeway in a little Toyota Tercel, I watched him accelerate to sixty miles per hour while realizing I was putting my life in his hands.

“Okay, Justin, merge out onto the freeway.”

He quickly looked in his rearview mirror, hit his signal, and whap, changed lanes like that.

“Justin! What, what, what? You didn’t even look!”

“Yes, I did,” he replied, “I looked right there.”

“Justin, over your shoulder, look over your shoulder.”

“I can’t, Dad. If I look over my shoulder I can’t see forward, and I can’t do that.”

Justin did eventually obtain a driver’s license. But every time he left alone in the car, my wife and I worried about receiving that dreaded phone call that he got in an accident. For the first few months, we would worry every time he drove away. Justin was never in an accident—praise the Lord. However, during his first few months as a driver, he locked his keys in the car three times and left his lights on several times so the battery went dead. Guess who he called on for help, sometimes very late at night? Thankfully we got through it all without any serious damage.

In the same way, some men seem to grasp the principles of leading their family more easily than others. Personality and personal experience can affect a man’s ability to grasp these principles. But no matter what personality God gave us, we must remember we are new creations in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17). Our personal experiences cannot stop God from completing His work within and through us. Only our own rebellion or lack of faith can hinder this.

What Was God Thinking?

Men, this role God has given us to lead our families may be new information for you. And even if you already know about this responsibility, you may be questioning how God could even consider putting you in the driver’s seat. I remember who I was when God blessed me with a wife and then blessed us with three beautiful children. My wife and I were baby Christians and had no idea how to tend to each other according to His Word, but God saw our future and knew we would come to Him.

If we’re honest, it can be overwhelming, even frightening, to have this responsibility. Praise God that He promises to be with us all the way and to provide all the information and strength we need to learn how to do it. He expects us to make mistakes and knows about the learning curve. But He knows we can do it if we abide in Him and His Word each day.

God knows our weaknesses and fears and everything about us, even when we are ignorant. He is not thinking we’ll never learn, because He is there to help. Like many men, I have struggled with seeing it that way, wondering if I would ever learn, because I kept looking at who I was apart from

Christ rather than who I am in Christ. Psalm 139:1-18 reveals that God knows everything about us: our hurts, bitter grudges toward others, lust, selfishness, and even the effects our parents' mistakes would have on us. He has known it all from the beginning and still said "I love you" in Christ's sacrifice for us. Likewise, God has called you, anointed you, and is trusting you with the leadership of your family. Now, you must learn to trust Him.

But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. (Matthew 10:30)

God loves you so much, has such intimate knowledge of each individual, that He even counts the number of hairs on your head. (For some of us, that job is getting easier over time!) God knows us inside and out. Second Timothy 1:9 says God "has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began." Fill in the blanks below.

Called us with a _____ calling,
not according to our _____,
but according to _____ own _____
and _____.

Grace is power given to us by God, and this is divine power to do anything He has called you to do, including leading your family.

When the Lord Jesus died on the cross, it covered everything you would ever do or be, including the good, the bad, and the ugly. Second Corinthians 5:17 says, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new." You have been redeemed, a new creation in Him. We only need to ask, seek, believe, and receive all He has done, and it is ours.

In Ephesians we learn that God has chosen us, called us to Himself, and sees us as pure and without sin when we choose to receive the salvation provided in Christ (Ephesians 1:4-7). Our calling is holy, designed to bring glory to God (verse 6) and to accomplish His will in every area of our lives (Ephesians 2:10). This calling is not based on good works or ability (Ephesians 2:8-9), because we had the best parents, have not committed the "worst" sins, are wealthy or poor, or any other human reason. The calling is God's idea and will be worked out by His anointing.

At the time of your birth, God already saw your entire life, so it can be said that every event was predestined, including your marriage and the births of your children. God wants all of us to continuously, daily, look at our responsibility from an eternal perspective, remembering that He has called, anointed, and will enable us to do great things according to His will (2 Peter 1:1-4).

DIG DEEPER

Describe what God has done and promised. What should be your response?

But as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct. (1 Peter 1:15)

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 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)

Do You Believe You Are Called?

What doubts, what fears, what lie has Satan told you that has kept you from believing that you are called by Almighty God to accomplish His purposes? God is *not* a liar.

When I first learned of my leadership role, I studied Scripture and realized what God wanted me to do for my wife and children. I said, "God, I can't do that." I can imagine Him smiling, thinking "Oh, really, Craig? Like I don't know you? I know you can't do it on your own." It is by His grace that I am able to do anything right in life. But I can't live in that realm of "Poor me. I can't do anything." I must remember that I'm a child of God. I have been called, anointed by God, to walk in righteousness and to accomplish His will in every area of my life. No exceptions.

When I began as a husband, and then a father, there was nothing good in my flesh, nothing I brought into the relationships that made me what God desired. But I knew that all was available to me in Christ because of His love and grace. I had to look into His Word and believe that He called me, anointed me, and would give me all I need. We cannot doubt. We cannot fear.

DIG DEEPER

Identify what God promises to do for you.

[God] will also confirm you to the end, that you may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Corinthians 1:8)

For the arms of the wicked shall be broken,
But the Lord upholds the righteous. (Psalm 37:17)

“My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.”
Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ
may rest upon me. (2 Corinthians 12:9)

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)

Being confident means “assured, convinced in your inner being.” This is a true and absolute promise from God. He will complete His work in you. What God desires to do through us, He will do in us if we believe and put our trust in Him.

Do Not Doubt

You cannot become the man God has called you to be as a husband and father if you doubt His promises.

So Jesus answered and said to them, “Have faith in God. For assuredly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, ‘Be removed and be cast into the sea,’ and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that those things he says will be done, he will have whatever he says. Therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them.” (Mark 11:22–24)

This is not a prosperity doctrine: “God, I visualize a Mercedes. I’m claiming it.” It means to pray in faith and ask God for anything He promises in His Word.

He has called you to be holy (1 Peter 1:15); to lead (Ephesians 5:23); and to love, cherish, and nurture your wife as He loves the church (Ephesians 5:25, 29). He has called you to raise your children according to His Word (Ephesians 6:4). When you see these verses, cry out to Him, “Oh, God, I can’t! But I want to. I pray for it, I believe it, and I’m asking you to change me. I want Your promises. I want to be holy, to be the husband and father You desire. God, please teach me to love, oversee, and lead my family.”

God will never answer this way: “Well, I don’t know. You’re kind of a goofball. You did this wrong and that, and I’m not sure if I want to help you.” He loves your wife and each child far more than you ever could. God is waiting and pleading, “Oh, please ask so I can pour My blessings into you.” He wants His love and grace to pour through you to your family.

God did not want me, Craig Caster, to stay the way I was when I got married. He saw every weakness, but one of God’s purposes for marriage is our personal transformation into the image of Jesus Christ (Romans 8:29). When I failed, I had to believe that God was still working in me and had a plan for my success. By trusting God, I have the confidence to pray, asking God to change me and give me the ability to succeed. God called and anointed me, saying, “This is your gift, Craig, and this is My will for you.” I could choose at any time not to believe in that gift and not trust Him.

This is a continuing process. I haven’t always done it well. Praise God that some of the best belly-laughs we have around my house come from talking about the foolish things I did and some of the mule-headed actions of my son Nicholas.

Lesson 2

Believe God's Promises

We must believe. Men, the key to being a leader and overseer of your family is believing the promises of God, leaving who you were in the past, your own ways, and abiding in Him and in His Word daily.

Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me." (Matthew 16:24)

To *deny* is not just referring to our old habits and attitudes. It also means denying who we were apart from Christ. The *Believer's Bible Commentary* says, "To deny self is not the same as self-denial; it means to yield to His control so completely that self has no rights whatever."¹ Christ now owns us, and we are to be concerned about His purposes and plans for our lives. I was stuck for years while I kept looking at who I was apart from Christ. And when I would study scriptural truths like "You cannot be my disciple unless you do ..." or "A disciple does ...," I never related those verses to myself. I thought when they spoke of *disciples*, they were referring to somebody else. But these verses are for *all* of us.

Ladies, sometimes your husbands' past mistakes can cause you to doubt what God promises to do in and through your husband to become that leader. But remember, it's about putting your trust in God for what He can do. It's a choice to be an advocate for your husband through prayer and encouraging words. If you ask for God's grace to be that, He will do it.

DIG DEEPER

Describe who you are in Christ, what God has done for you, and what your response should be.

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. (2 Corinthians 5:17)

Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 3:13-14)

Men, we are tempted to say, “Well, that’s not who I am. I’ve blown it for many years. I tried.” But God says, “Take your eyes off who you are, and put them on who you can be in Christ.” The Bible calls you a new creature, called and anointed by God to lead and oversee your family. When you start believing that and desire to change, your life will never be the same. Our God, who has chosen us in Jesus Christ, is able to do all things and promises to give us all we need to accomplish the task before us. God will give us the ability to fulfill every instruction He has given to us as men, as overseers of our wives and children. We are the only ones who can stop that from happening.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love. (Ephesians 1:3-4)

We must remember that all our holiness and blessings reside in Jesus Christ. Being godly leaders means we aspire to become like Jesus, through the power of His Holy Spirit within us (Ephesians 1:13, 19).

Men who come to counseling have all types of attitudes. One man, said, “Well, okay, I sin. Everybody sins.” He began to tell me his story and I asked, “Have you told your wife you’re sorry?” He replied, “No, she blows it too.” What kind of leader is that?

Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. (1 Corinthians 10:31)

The only standard for our behavior is glorifying God in our homes—in front of our wives and children. We must desire it. We must aspire to it. No excuses. Every day you make a choice, a commitment.

FACT FILE

To glorify—To reflect, to honor, praise, to give esteem or honor by putting Him into an honorable position.

You could pray something like this:

God, I want my behavior, seen and unseen, to glorify you. And if it doesn't, I'm asking that Your Holy Spirit convict me. Especially if I blow it in front of the most important people in my life, my wife and my children. I'm asking, God, for the humility to go to them and ask for forgiveness. Help me glorify You. Amen.

God has never let me down. And I have had some lengthy arguments with Him when He’s told me to deal with things.

He will listen to you. He will be patient. And He is relentless if you give Him time to speak to you. Crawl up in His lap during your devotional time, and He will give you the grace and power to follow His Word.

For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s. (1 Corinthians 6:20)

Self-Examination 1

Ask the Lord to examine your heart. Ask Him to show you where you have doubted His promises. Confess your unbelief—be specific. Ask Him for greater faith to believe and to begin to trust His promises in these areas.

Write your prayer here.

Representing God

When your wife and children see you, do they see someone who reflects the attitudes and behavior of the Lord? Again, that is our goal, and we can never make excuses for failure. Take it to the Lord.

To be a godly leader, you must first be a follower of God and be concerned about glorifying Him. Examine yourself often. *Am I reflecting the nature of God? Do I know what that looks like?*

Many Christian men have a flippant attitude toward being Christlike or believing that marriage is part of the sanctification process. One young man who said, “We all sin. Come on, can I be perfect?” was being foolish about his sin and disrespectful to his wife. If we have that attitude, we are not answering the call of God.

If you ever tell yourself, “I’m not a bad guy, never killed anybody, quit smoking, don’t drink much, and don’t carouse. You know, I’m a good ole boy!” then you are on the pathway to misery. You will never find real happiness and fulfillment in your home, and neither will your wife and children.

Self-Examination 2

Husband, ask God to reveal areas where you have *not* been glorifying Him in your family. Write them here and ask forgiveness from God for each. Then ask forgiveness from family members.

Wife, how are you doing with your interceding in prayer for your husband? Write your praise report or a confession to trust God and yield to being that helpmate God asks you to be.

No Excuses

I had lunch with a guy I had counseled about fourteen years earlier and learned he had not followed through with what I had told him to do. He was asking for input, again, on how to fix his messy, unhappy life. I asked him, “Do you want me to pull out my magic wand and wave it over you? You didn’t do one thing I told you, and every time you had an excuse. Are your pride and sin such good company now?”

He was divorced and had two kids he hadn’t seen in eighteen months. This guy had every reason in the world for why he wouldn’t do what God told him to do. Is there any valid excuse for ignoring the calling and anointing of God? *No excuses*. Only you can choose to reject God’s invitations. What follows is tragedy and pain instead of blessing and joy.

We can all choose to say, “I don’t want to do this. I don’t believe this will work. It takes too much effort.” When God first began to nudge me toward full-time ministry, and I realized it meant speaking in front of people, I said, “No, God I’m not doing that. I’m not going to teach, and I’m not going to stand up in front of people, and I’m definitely not going to read in front of people. But I’ll do anything else for You.”

He kept pushing and pushing. He was relentless. And when I finally said, “Okay, I really believe You are calling me to do it,” God began to show me what He can do. I finally got out of the way and decided to believe in His calling and His anointing in ministry. But it did not come until I had committed myself to His *first* ministry for me, to being a godly leader to my wife and children. I surrendered to God’s will and believed that all His promises were available to me.

Lesson 3

Trusting God Daily

Husbands and wives need to trust God with His calling and election upon their lives in *all* areas. He promises to give us the grace to walk in His truths and give us all we need. Our part is to learn how, desire to obey, and abide in Him daily.

Believe God's Promises

We need to remember that all God's blessing come through our faith in Jesus Christ. The Father's first desire is that we are becoming more and more transformed into the image of His Son.

God promises this:

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. (2 Peter 1:4)

Ask God in faith:

If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways. (James 1:5-8)

See the transformation:

For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. (Romans 8:29)

Be Like Jesus

Desire to be one with Him, pray for it, and keep this a priority. This is the foundation upon which all else is built. Choose to crawl up in God's lap every day, be in His Word, and spend some time with Him alone. With a prayerful attitude, say you want to be like Him, and ask for the strength and guidance to do His will. God will always answer that prayer.

Self-Examination

Has your daily devotional time been consistent? Do you spend time in prayer by yourself and praying with the family? If you have been failing in this area, write a prayer below asking God's forgiveness and for the grace to start again and stay at it.

God Provides

Remember that God will supply all the power you need and the humility to ask forgiveness when you fail. Do not excuse, cover up, or fear your failures. Jesus covered that on the cross. We need to be willing to ask for forgiveness. That is the key to our transformation. God's Holy Spirit convicts us when we sin (John 16:8-9). It is our responsibility to confess the sin (1 John 1:9), to repent or turn the other direction toward holiness (Acts 17:30), and ask His forgiveness (Ephesians 1:7) in order to be restored to full fellowship and to be transformed. Be sure to ask forgiveness of the person who was hurt by your behavior.

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)

If you need to seek forgiveness or need help forgiving someone, see *Appendix P: Trust and Forgiveness* to help you understand and practice forgiveness in your marriage.

The Wife's Part

Wives, I know you are familiar with your husband's failures, which is the very reason for you to have faith, believing what God can do in both of you. Affirming your husband and helping him succeed in the godly leadership of your home require that you practice looking at him with God's eternal perspective. I've tried to imagine how hard it was for my wife to look at me, believing I could change after knowing me for so many years as I was. It has been a process of constant faith, with failures along the way, as God has made me into a leader, pastor, and priest over my home. But she chose to believe, praise God, and she quit looking at me for who I was and said, "Okay, God, this is what You say he can be. I'm trusting You when I feel that I can't trust him." Notice the word *feel* and realize feelings can and will change. But God's truth is unchanging.

Wives, have you been trusting God? He will give you the faith to trust and the grace (power) to lovingly, humbly, and in an affirming way be a helpmate to your husband as you are both being transformed into the image of Christ.

Write your prayer below asking for God's help.

God Has Already Been There

God is never surprised by us because He lives in eternity—outside of time. He sees our lives as a whole, so He already knows what is going to happen.

For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them. (Ephesians 2:10)

Two truths in this passage bring us comfort. First, we are *His* workmanship. You are God’s poem, becoming His masterpiece, which includes your marriage and family. Second, His grace enables us to do His will. We are created in Christ Jesus for good works. You can praise God that no matter what situation you may face today or tomorrow with your spouse and kids, God has already been there and prepared you to do good works. However, you must look to Him and choose to walk His path for you.

FACT FILE

Workmanship—Our English word *poem* comes from *poema* (Greek), which means to make something, a work, a workpiece, workmanship,² masterpiece.

Men, husbands, and fathers, God wants you to know that He has called you and designed you to lead, not in your own strength, but in His power and might. God created the family and has made His plan clear how to manage it, placing our wives and children under our authority and protection. This may be a new concept, as it is certainly not taught or popular in today’s society. It may be a difficult adjustment for your wife, but do not be discouraged. Keep seeking God’s guidance. Be humble and obedient, and you will all be blessed.

Authority in the Family Is God’s Design

Just as a corporation is governed by a leader following customs and an organizational management style, so is a family. But there is a crucial difference: our family model comes from God, not a secular blueprint for success. We will not prosper if we use traditions, cultural norms, ethnic beliefs, secular advice, or anything that is outside the Word and will of God.

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

FACT FILE

Helper—One who comes along and assists, not leads, but assists.

Many families are struggling because the wife was raised one way, the man another, and the wife has been given the lead in many areas of home life. This seems natural as she becomes the primary nurturer of the children and keeper of the household duties. It is common for the husband to come home and function as his wife’s helpmate. Although this pattern has developed within our society, it is not God’s way.

DIG DEEPER

Describe the order God has established for family.

But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God. (1 Corinthians 11:3)

Wives, submit unto your own husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.
Husbands, love your wives and do not be bitter toward them.
Children, obey your parents in all things, for this is well pleasing to the Lord.
Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged.
(Colossians 3:18-21)

God established an authority structure, a management style. This order is clear throughout Scripture: God, man, woman, and children. Men, if you have given or yielded your responsibility to your wife in any area, this is not God's will. Some wives have fought for it and won, but you have lost what God assigned to you. That is to relinquish responsibility to someone not equipped by God to handle it, and this is why so many marriages are suffering and why couples are not bearing fruit for God in their marriages. To take this to a more shocking level, God says a man needs to lead in *all* areas of the home, not just some (1 Timothy 3:4-5). This is God's express will for the family.

Individual Strengths

A premarital couple was planning to use the "his strengths, her strengths" lifestyle in marriage. They took some tests and the results came up equal for shared responsibility. Then the finances swung to 80 percent in her favor as the leader. And I asked, "Where did you come up with this? Okay, so you're better at budgeting and accounting, more frugal, better at reconciling your checkbook, but does that mean you should have 80 percent of decision making in the finances? What does the Bible say? The Bible says that the man is to lead in every area." I'm not aiming at women, because lots of men would love to have their wives take care of their responsibilities.

If a wife has the gifts and talents of reconciling a checkbook and paying the bills and being more organized in those types of things, should she be doing that? Praise God, yes. Especially if the husband is not good at it. She's your helpmate. It's not relinquishing it to her if all the decisions are made jointly with your approval. Our goal is to fulfill God's will and purpose and glorify Him, and if you are handling areas where she has greater skill, then delegate and oversee. But don't walk away and dump all the responsibility and stress for the budget on her, and then complain about not knowing where all the money's going or why the tithe checks are not being sent out.

The husband and wife need to have a clear, jointly agreed-upon expense budget. They need to establish a method of how the bills will be paid monthly and who will be doing the actual paying. If a wife is better equipped and organized, then she can do it. But the man needs to be involved and aware of all income, expenses, and any changes that are being considered before any changes are made to the financial plan for the family.

ACTION PLAN

If you have never been disciplined on finances from a Christian perspective, make a commitment to go online or contact your church to see if they use Crown Financial Ministries or Dave Ramsey's materials. Both can be taught in a small group setting, or you can visit them online for information.

A Proper Way to Lead

The husband or father is to lead as God instructs, not as a dictator with a heavy hand, but as a loving servant of the Lord.

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 they may know the truth. (2 Timothy 2:24–25)

These four principles of leadership come directly from God's Word and are the guidelines for leading in His will. A husband does well when he leads and corrects in this way.

1. Be a Servant

As a man of God, a servant of the Lord has surrendered to do His will. The Bible says to be a leader, you first must be a servant. This does mean to ask your wife or children what they want you to do to serve them. Some dads have become the go-to guy for doing their wife's or even their children's will, which is chaos.

Responsibility is shared, but not *authority*. Men, we surrender to God's design for us to oversee and be aware in all areas. But delegation is also God's design. Jesus came to do His Father's will. The Father delegated work to the Son, and He delegates to us. We can delegate to those in our family.

2. Be Gentle

A servant must be gentle to all. God does not want a dominating spirit to be our leadership style.

As you serve God you will make mistakes, sometimes willfully and sometimes out of ignorance. As you oversee your family, as they learn to yield to your gentle, reasonable leadership, there will be disobedience and mistakes. Remember, you are God's representative to them, a reflection of Him. God is patient and forgiving when we humble ourselves before Him. Extend that love to those He has placed in your care, your wife and children. Overseeing, giving direction, and applying God's wisdom is your responsibility, but that also includes forgiveness and mercy when those in your family fail to follow your lead.

FACT FILE

Gentle—Seemly, fitting; equitable, fair, moderate, forbearing, not insisting on the letter of the law; it expresses considerateness that looks humanely and reasonably at the facts of a case."³

You may have a strong-willed wife who is struggling, and you can see this information is not appealing to her. You may be fearful of a discussion, much less actually taking the lead in some areas. This is common. Some women have their own territory and will not budge. They say to their

husband, "What do you mean *lead*? You don't even know where you're going. Look at all the bad things you've done . . . and I'm going to let you lead me? Forget it!"

Some men listen to that and believe it and don't have the courage to step up and say, "No, we're going to turn this around, whatever it takes. We're going to press in, and we're going to change. I believe that God has called me, anointed me, and He wants me to quit looking at my past failures and start looking at Him and believe the promises." Choose to believe God in the face of difficulty and follow Him.

Gentleness is a fruit of the Spirit, which comes from your relationship with God.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. (Galatians 5:22-23)

ACTION PLAN 2

Husband, if moving forward into a leadership role in your family is a struggle, write a prayer for strength and for God to open your wife's heart.

Wife, if you are having difficulty receiving these truths from God's Word, write a prayer asking God to help you with your unbelief and for His grace to help your husband become a godly leader.

3. Be Humble

A godly servant treats others with humility. This means esteeming others as greater than ourselves, not seeing ourselves as better or more important but equal in the sight of God. It is God who calls and anoints us. He provides all the instruction and power to succeed.

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

If I had approached my wife and declared, "All right, I'm the boss according to God, and it's about time since I'm the wisest one here, the one who has always known it all anyway," would she have wanted to submit to me? What we communicate with our attitudes may be closer to that than we realize. I was a selfish, undeserving jerk when God called and forgave me. Then I learned that He wanted me to lead and my wife to submit, but my leadership was to come from a heart of gentleness and humility. That's doing it His way, showing much grace and patience with our wives even when they are bucking the system or when our children challenge us.

4. Bring Correction

A leader is told to correct those who are under his authority. But we must understand what this word *correcting* means. First, it means bringing clarity to the Word and the will of God in any situation, having a godly plan to follow. Second, it means implementing that plan by standing up, pressing in, not giving up, not retreating, and not relinquishing your responsibility. When God speaks to you through His Word, don't say, "Well, that was pretty powerful, maybe we should use one or two of those principles." Please want it *all*, believe and pray for it *all*, and commit to working out what God commands.

The Bible says all things are possible with God (Mark 9:23; 10:27). Jesus is the example of how to lead in our homes, and His Word teaches us how to do it when there are trials and opposition. A leader is not to be passive or uninvolved. We are not to relinquish our responsibility or authority. Remember, wives are our helpmates, and we are foolish not to include their input or delegate to their talents and abilities. A wife most often manages the home and, as a mother, often spends more time managing the children, but this can be a team effort with the husband overseeing and having the word of authority in any final decision. This is God's management style for the family.

ACTION PLAN 3

Husband, if you have any fears or reservations about this God-given responsibility, write your prayer below. Ask God for the wisdom and grace to move forward, trusting Him to enable you to work out these principals in your home. Ask for patience and perseverance to lovingly handle any opposition from your wife or children.

Wife, if you have already been praying for this, praise the Lord and ask for the strength to encourage and affirm your husband. Write your prayer below. If you have fears and reservations, confess them, and ask God for the grace to believe that this is His plan for your family, even when it doesn't *feel* right.

Lesson 4

The Father's Influence

Research has repeatedly shown that fathers possess a supernatural power that surpasses the influence of a mother. Even the secular philosopher Sigmund Freud, noted writer on family dynamics, acknowledged that fathers have an unusual power to influence the course of a child's life. As Christians we know this is proof of God's design, the plan that puts men in the leadership role over the family. Couples who follow this plan and are willing to receive and implement God's will bring glory to God and are assured of His blessing in their lives.

Statistics from 2000 said when a mother is the first one to accept Christ in a home, there's a 17 percent chance the rest of the family will come to know Christ. But when a father is the first one to accept Jesus Christ, there's a 93 percent chance the entire family will come to know the Lord.⁴ That's one of many statistics that demonstrate the influence fathers have over their children.

Yes, a man is created by God to lead, but a woman is created to be his helpmate, essential to him being fulfilled and equipped to fulfill that role. Is a wife less important? Absolutely not. Men, we need the input and help of our wives. As women they complete us with wisdom, knowledge, discernment, perspective, and gifts from God that we do not possess. A woman who is nurturing and parenting the children is following a plan established by both parents. It must be clear to them that she is under Dad's protection and representing him as she implements rules and discipline. This way, a wife is under the protection of God-given leadership. In a household where Mom is leading in the parenting, for whatever reason, she will eventually feel stressed, frustrated, and unfulfilled. If Dad is not in the lead, the challenge is to change it. And, men, you are the only ones who can take the lead. Do you believe this?

Husbands and wives, as you move forward to implement this type of home management, there will always be resistance. For example, in my home we made it clear that when the kids were messing with my wife, they were messing with me. One way I protected and supported my wife was to say, "Choose wisely. If you want a double discipline, just ignore your mom and wait until I get home. Remember, when I'm not here, Mom is in charge. I'm president; she's VP."

If you have children, I strongly encourage you to complete our parenting series, Parenting Is a Ministry, available on our website, FDM.world. This will teach you how to lead. Include your wife in all areas that pertain to decision making within the family, including finances and training the children. God says you are one, so why would you neglect her input and help?

Resistance Brings Consequences

There are times when my wife and I disagree and she is called to yield to me, putting her trust in God, not Craig Caster. And when she voluntarily yields to my authority, not with moodiness, harshness, or holding back physically, she is truly affirming my leadership.

Describe what God is saying here.

Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment upon themselves. (Romans 13:1-2)

Ouch! This is a spiritual law established by God, not something men campaigned to get for themselves. Some authority does not seem to make sense, and for some of you, just like my wife, there are questions in your mind.

But notice that Scripture says, “There is no authority except from God” (verse 1). That is pretty inclusive: no authority. In this case we have government over all citizens (Titus 3:1; 1 Peter 2:13-17), but God also speaks of the church and pastors’ authority over all believers (Hebrews 13:7, 17), the headship of husband over wife (1 Corinthians 11:3, 8-9; Ephesians 5:22), the rule of parents over children (Exodus 20:12; Proverbs 6:20-22; 23:22; Luke 2:51; Ephesians 6:1), and the position of masters over all employees (Ephesians 6:5-8; Colossians 3:22; 1 Peter 2:18).

Notice that, “The authorities that exist are appointed by God” (verse 1). This same word for *appointed* is used in Acts 13:48, “as many as had been appointed to eternal life.” God controls those in authority. That means good government officials and bad, good pastors and bad, good husbands and bad, good parents and bad, good employers and bad. We may not understand this, but that is what the Word of God says. Why do you think there were, and are, so many martyrs? Christians have been killed under the hand of the government (as well as many other authorities) because they would not deny their faith, even when threatened with death. The martyrs lived and died by the principle that “God appoints all authority.”

Scripture also notes that those who “resists the authority resists the ordinance of God” (verse 2), which is rebelling directly against the Lord. By resisting this order, you bring divine judgment on yourself. God spoke these spiritual laws into existence. They are similar to physical laws we reviewed earlier, like gravity. Gravity is a good thing. It keeps us down here on the earth with our feet firmly on the ground. That is what God’s truth does. It keeps us firmly planted in His will so we can receive His blessings for obedience.

Husbands, God has appointed you to lead from a position of authority. If you say, “I know I am supposed to lead but _____,” you are resisting what God has ordained you to do, breaking a spiritual law, and bringing judgment upon yourself. This judgment can come in many forms: lack of power to live the Christian life; trouble understanding God due to your disobedience; diminishing intimacy with the Lord resulting in loss of peace, joy, confidence, and contentment; and much more. Depression, anxiety, doubt, and fear will follow.

A wife's challenge is to trust the Lord under the husband's leadership. Whether a man is refusing to take authority or a wife is unwilling to yield and accept God's plan for marriage, both are going to suffer consequences. God is going to spank them by bringing some kind of pain.

Disobedience to spiritual laws always brings pain. This may be a judgment that brings loss of joy, peace, and contentment, resulting in confusion, misery, and eventually depression. Statistics show that some 45 percent of the people in Christendom are on psych meds due to bouts of depression. I have counseled many who define themselves as clinically depressed. After examining how they are tending to each other as a husband and wife, it becomes clear why they are depressed. I may say, "Well, you are breaking about eight spiritual laws. I'm surprised you're doing as well as you are. We cannot break spiritual laws without reaping the consequences, feeling pain both in heart and mind." Depression often is the result of unconfessed sin and an unrepentant heart. This can result when a man will not lead or a woman will not submit.

Self-Examination

Can you trust God with this truth? How do you feel when you read that God disciplines and motivates us with pain if we don't yield to Him? Write a prayer asking Him for faith to accept His truth. Meditate on the verse below. You can trust God's work in your life because it comes from His love for you as a dear child.

And you have forgotten the exhortation which is addressed to you as sons,
"My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord,
Nor faint when you are reproved by Him;
For those whom the Lord loves He disciplines,
And He scourges every son whom He receives." (Hebrews 12:5-6 NASB)

Spiritual Training

An important aspect of a man's authority involves spiritual training and oversight. We covered some of this in volume 3, lesson 9. A man does this first by daily abiding in Christ through prayer and study of God's Word. The next daily practice is to become involved by listening, helping, and discussing spiritual things with his wife. A husband is to be concerned about his wife's protection, and the most important aspect of that is her spiritual growth and devotional life.

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. (Ephesians 5:25-26)

Another aspect of a man's responsibility is the training and discipline of his children. Again, the blueprint for discipline is only found in God's Word, and daily time here and in prayer is a necessity. This is not a one-man job but also requires time spent together, as husband and wife, in discussion and prayer. All this is done in the context of a loving relationship with God and with each other.

All this commitment, study, and obedience is an act of love for God, trusting that He loves us and wants the best for us. For a man to disciple his wife and children, helping them learn how to abide in God and His Word, is an investment in eternity. That's our commission, to produce fruit for God's kingdom.

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)

I remember back in 1988, when God spoke to me: "Craig, your first ministry is your family." I thought, "Well, how did I miss this?" So I started teaching my kids with a weekly Bible study. My daughter is our youngest, and almost every night we went over her devotion for the day. I have seen the blessings resulting from my obedience to God in this area. The life decisions that my grown children are now making bless my wife and me beyond our wildest dreams.

First Timothy 3:4 says, "One who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence." *To rule* means "to manage." We are to make sure our children are submitting to our authority, honoring our wives, and accepting our training. God has called us to do this.

Lesson 5

Priests of the Home

Husband, you are a priest over your home, just as a priest is over the church. This important role truly ministers to your wife and children. When you perform your function as God's Word guides, you are not only serving Him, but also your wife and children. Have you ever looked at yourself as a priest? Let's examine the six elements.

Wife, as a helpmate, you must know God's will for your husband as the leader and priest over the family. Most men did not have a good example and have never been disciplined how. But there is power in intercessional prayer. Learn these elements so you can intercede in prayer for him.

Six Elements of Priesthood

First, your daily devotion is essential. This is your personal time with the Lord, admitting to yourself and showing God and your family that you need His guidance and strength to get through each day. I can't exhort you enough about the importance of your daily devotion. Every day I choose to be alone with the Lord, I am honoring Him and reminding myself, "I need You, God. I can't do it without You." I can't rely on the last thirty-something years of experience. I can't rely on the wisdom He has given me before. I can't rely on anything else but His daily grace. So I go to Him every day and prove that there's nothing more important. I need His grace to be the husband and father He called me to be. Is your daily devotion an example? Are you glorifying Christ in your house?

Second, your example is an inspiration. Just as a pastor is to be righteous before his flock, so it is with men to be a model of faithfulness to the Lord in his family. We all fail to glorify God, but what do you do when you fail to represent God in your behavior? Glorifying God means we do not excuse any behavior, word, or deed done in front of our wives or children that does not exemplify Jesus. When a man is faithfully confessing his sin to the Lord, and asking his wife and children to forgive him for his behavior, then he is exemplifying the priesthood to which God has called him.

Third, you are called to pray, constantly and regularly. Make a commitment to pray with your wife every day. This brings the power of God into your life. Many men struggle with this because they keep looking at the past, or their mistakes, and they feel inadequate. Don't look at those things. Just be obedient to God and press in. This includes praying with your children at night.

Fourth, disciple your children. If you don't know how to do this, go to our website for our free parenting materials. Discipling is a planned practice of meeting and guiding the children through God's Word, remembering to keep it on their level of understanding. It means focusing Scripture on areas where you, as their overseer, have detected spiritual problems or weaknesses in them. It means listening to their childish fears and ideas with patience, always treating them with dignity, understanding it is your task to deliver them from foolishness and protect them from worldly influences. This is the way you will prove to them that God has you in their lives to guide them into responsible adulthood with love. This will stay with them through periods of rebellion.

Fifth, God says, “not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together” (Hebrews 10:25). This means the family is to consistently attend a Bible-believing church, benefiting from all the friends, fellowship, teaching, and activities involved. The church is a part of God’s design for believers to help us grow in the knowledge of Christ, serve one another, and equip us to do His will (Ephesians 4:12–16). You are the leader in this, not leaving Sunday morning preparation to your wife and skipping out if you want to watch sports or participate in some other nonessential activity. Remember, it is our responsibility to lead by example, by putting God first, before our own selfish desires.

Describe what God is saying here.

And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching. (Hebrews 10:24–25)

Sixth, financial stewardship is important to God. Creating a budget is something you should do with your wife. Finances can become a big issue in marriage. A young couple came in for counseling. The husband said his wife was not submitting to his leadership in the financial area. After a bit of investigation, I asked them if they have a budget. His wife said, “No, and we come up short every month. No budget, and now he wants to go back to school. I voiced my concerns, but he told me to have faith.” I gave them homework to write a budget, one that includes providing financial security. Managing money requires a plan. It’s not based on false and reckless ideas about faith.

A Leader Provides

Meditate on this verse, and consider how this should affect your responsibility as a husband.

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

In this definition of *provide*, God has placed a lot of responsibility upon husbands. Notice that it starts with a prepared mind but ends with doing. One commentator says, “Provision for one’s own family is a spiritual issue of utmost importance. Failure to live out the gospel in this way is tantamount to a denial of the faith.”⁶ You must provide for your family.

FACT FILE

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.⁵

Some men are either lazy or rebellious against God and are not faithfully serving Him in this area. Other men have made finances and financial goals a first priority over their wives and children.

Wealthy men can be self-sufficient, self-righteous, and spiritually blind because money gives them a false sense of security and power. Men in the lower- or middle-class income groups are sometimes working so hard to rise and have such ambition that they think they are too busy, their job is important, and they don't have the time to commit to the things concerning their families.

But God's Word sets your priorities. It takes time to love, cherish, and nurture your wife, to raise the children you brought into the world together. If you are spending seventy hours a week building your own kingdom, pursuing wealth, and unwilling to work at implementing these truths, then you are ignoring the responsibility God has given you. All the financial gain can cost you great pain and loss. Your children could walk away from God, or you could destroy your marriage with neglect.

DIG DEEPER

Identify the biblical principles Jesus wants us to apply to our finances.

No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon. (Matthew 6:24)

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

God says we must look to Him for our priorities. We must trust Him for our jobs, for our direction, for the opportunities that open up. We must be faithful in these areas, but providing cannot be at the expense of our families.

God Provides What We Need

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. (2 Peter 1:1-4)

God says He has given us every spiritual gift we need to accomplish His will. Yes, we need to abide and spend time with Him daily. Yes, we must aspire to be like Him. Yes, we must choose to search His Word and learn what He expects of us. That is our part, but God promises to fill us with divine power, enabling us to be godly leaders. Do you want others to see Christ in you, for your marriage to be an example of the relationship that Christ has with His church? Do you want your children to be so blessed that they become a blessing to others wherever they go? Do you want your family to truly trust and serve God because of what He has done in you?

A father is greatly blessed to see his children tested by the world yet conclude that, “Nothing the devil has to offer comes close to what I saw God do within our home.” When children witness the power of God’s love flowing through their father and are blessed by his godly leadership in the home, it brings fulfillment to them. God pours His power and blessing on every single one of us who say, “I want it.”

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 glory forever and ever. Amen.
(Hebrews 13:20–21)

For further study, and to determine the strongholds that are holding you back from God’s best for your marriage, complete *Appendix M: Common Stumbling Blocks*.

Pray Together

James 4:2–3 tells us to ask according to the will of God. If we ask anything that is in accordance with His will, He promises to fulfill it. Now that you have learned what God desires as a godly leader, believe it, and rebuke every thought that says you can’t. Remember, it is not how you were raised, who you were before salvation, or even the mistakes you have made up to this point. God’s mercies are new every day, and He promises to forgive you and give you the grace to work everything out that He has called you to do.

Take all this to the Lord now, praying together as a couple.

Lord Jesus, we thank You for loving us when we were sinners and accepting us when we prayed to You for salvation. And now we praise You, God, for calling us to such an awesome and wonderful task—to follow Your plan for our marriage and our home. Father, make us faithful to lead and follow as You desire it. We know we cannot do this on our own but only by Your grace. Please, Lord, take away any doubts and fears that may hinder us from obeying the truth. We pray that You would bind the work of the Enemy, reveal his lies and deception, and replace them with godly wisdom and hope.

It is our desire to glorify You and accept this special family ministry. Have Your way in every area of our lives, Lord. We ask for healing, for reconciliation between us as husband and wife, and also with our children. May our family bring honor and glory to You in every area. We ask this in Your name, Jesus. Amen.

Marriage Self-Evaluation

After learning God's plan and purposes for your marriage, you will still experience difficulties. You may find yourself wondering if His plan is really working, or you may experience frustration because your spouse is not cooperating. If this happens, don't panic or look to the world's methods. Don't fall back on old habits. Instead, review *Appendix Q: Marriage Self-Evaluation* to discern the true source of the problem, and then review the principles in each workbook.

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 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 Q

Marriage Self-Evaluation

After learning God's plan and purposes for your marriage, you will still experience difficulties. You may find yourself wondering if His plan is really working, or you may experience frustration because your spouse is not cooperating. If this happens, don't panic or look to the world's methods. Don't fall back on old habits. Instead, use this evaluation to discern the true source of the problem, and then review the principles in each workbook.

Your Spiritual Foundation

- How is your devotional life? Read Psalm 1:1–3. Would you use words like *worshipping, listening, thanking, confessing, or interceding* to describe your daily communication with God?
- Do you read and meditate on God's Word in a daily quiet time?
- Are you trusting God with your finances and giving tithes regularly?
- Are your priorities in accordance with God's desires for you and your family?
- Is the fruit of the Spirit evident in your life (Galatians 5:22–23)?

You must depend upon the Lord. The key is not in your methods but in a relationship with God. Review volume 1, *Strong Foundation*, if you are lacking in this area.

Communicating in Love

- Do you listen to your spouse effectively? Review *Appendix E: Effective Listening Self-Evaluation*.
- Have you been reacting to your spouse in the flesh or responding to them in love?
- Are there areas where you need to improve in your communication or apologize to your spouse? Review "What Love Is Not," found in volume 2, lessons 2–4, numbered 1–9.
- Do you need to break the cycle of unloving communication? Review *Appendix G: Breaking the Cycle*.

Communication with and toward your spouse reflects the value you have placed on them. Review volume 2, *What Love Is*, if you are lacking in this area.

Meeting the Needs of Your Spouse

- Are you meeting your spouse's unique needs? Review volume 3, *Unique Needs*.
- The best way to lead or submit is by personal example. How are you doing?
- Are you and your spouse working together and supporting each other?
- How is your management style?

- Are you praying regularly for and with your spouse?
- Have you followed through with your commitment to have a weekly family Bible study?
- Are you meeting your spouse's physical needs? Review volume 4, *Physical Fulfillment*.
- Is biblical leadership out of balance in your home? Review volume 5, *Godly Leadership*.
- Do you need further discipleship in parenting, financial management, or another area? Visit FDM.world for additional resources.

God loves you, and He loves your spouse. You must trust Him. He has not given you a task beyond your ability as you trust Him and obey His will.

Getting Back on Track

Has God revealed areas in your family relationships where you have drifted? If so, follow the steps outlined below to get your home back on course.

1. Confess to God, acknowledging your weaknesses, mistakes, or failures.
2. Receive God's forgiveness. Allow Him to embrace you in His arms of love and grace.
3. Repent by turning away from your error and commit to walk in obedience to His will.
4. Ask for forgiveness from your spouse, if necessary.
5. Be willing to forgive your spouse, just as God in Christ has forgiven you.

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. Prideful; 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.