

MARRIAGE IS A MINISTRY SERIES

Craig Caster



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Strong Foundation

Marriage Is a Ministry Series Volume 1

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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Contents

Preface.....	vii
Introduction.....	ix
Lesson 1: A Personal Journey	1
Lesson 2: In the Beginning.....	7
Lesson 3: God, the Creator of Marriage	15
Lesson 4: God's Purposes for Marriage	21
Lesson 5: Cooperating with God's Discipline	29
Lesson 6: Strong Foundation.....	37
Lesson 7: Three Essential Ingredients.....	43
Lesson 8: God Wants Your Affection.....	51
Lesson 9: The Chief Cornerstone	59
Lesson 10: Amazing Transformation	67
Appendix Resources	75
Endnotes	91
About the Author	93
About Family Discipleship Ministries.....	95

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*.

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

A Personal Journey

This whole study focuses on God's design for marriage, which makes sense because He is the One who created man and woman to unite in this holy union. Seeing marriage as a ministry communicates our belief that the foundation for a successful marriage requires a ministry mindset. Both husband and wife are now in full-time ministry, ministering to each other with God's intended purposes. God did not put us here on earth expecting that we would figure out marriage on our own. The Bible—God's Word—contains complete information to guide us in all areas of the relationship.

In His Word, God shows us not only His purposes for marriage but also how to establish a foundation for a successful marriage. Through this study, you will learn the nature of true love, humankind's greatest companionship need. Beyond that, you will discover other companionship needs unique to a husband or wife because, as you know, men and women are different. Aren't we? By now, experience should have taught us that we are physically and emotionally distinct.

Understanding what God's Word says about companionship needs is foundational. Without this, we only have our own ideas of what we need or what we expect from another person. The attitude of "I think _____ is what I need" produces many nonbiblical expectations of what we believe a wife or husband is supposed to give in the marriage relationship, and then we find ourselves in trouble. Only as our true, God-given companionship needs are identified and met according to His plan will we experience fulfillment in marriage.

Before this study concludes, you will learn vital information about priestly leadership that is a God-given calling for the husband, but equally valuable information for wives. Ladies, be inspired by the pivotal importance of your biblical role, which is to support your man in the ministry God has anointed him to fill at home. By doing this, you will help your husband succeed, and help him believe that he can, by God's grace, become a godly leader and trust God to supply all he needs for success.

God wants to show Himself faithful. He loves showing off. He really does. He wants people to see His goodness, to glorify Him through marriage so others who are struggling will pause and wonder, *What have they got that we don't?* God is calling us to be a light in this dark world.

This marriage discipleship workbook has solutions for your problems, answers to those questions you have been tossing around. If you have been born into God's family through salvation in Jesus Christ, He calls you His child and has put His Holy Spirit within you to teach you from His Word. You have all you need for success. Your part is to desire to fulfill His will in your marriage, and that is the formula for reaping the blessings of God. Do not lose heart. Continue to press on.

Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows

to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life. And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart.
(Galatians 6:7–9)

After years of counseling I have observed that most Christians are ignorant of what God's will is for them in marriage.

Depend on God

God wants to make it known to you that He can provide whatever you need. As you read these verses, claim His promises in faith.

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 1:3–4)

Peter says God has given us “all things that pertain to life,” which includes all the necessary tools for building a biblical marriage. Our instruction is God's Word and, as it promises in verse 3, it is by “His divine power” that we will succeed.

When we are born again by faith in Jesus Christ, we receive the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1:13–14), and the power that raised Jesus from the dead begins working in us (Ephesians 1:19–20). But do not fail to notice that all this can only be accessed “through the knowledge of Him.”

Knowledge of Christ powerfully affects the believer and comes only through salvation and abiding in Him and His Word. *To abide* means “to dwell in” and indicates more than just head knowledge, an intellectual understanding of Jesus. It means receiving the Word as truth and then being obedient.

FACT FILE

Power—Dunamis (Greek). Dynamic strength or ability to do what only God can do. Our source is “His divine power.”

Knowledge—Epignosis (Greek). Thorough participation in acquiring knowledge. We partake of the divine nature and promises “through the knowledge of Him.”

As we abide in Christ, we not only gain knowledge that can change us, we also qualify for “great and precious promises” from a God who is 100 percent faithful. And, as a “partaker of the divine nature,” you truly have access to supernatural wisdom and strength for your marriage, according to His promises.

DIG DEEPER

Identify what God promises in these verses.

For the Lord God is a sun and shield;
The Lord will give grace and glory;
No good thing will He withhold
From those who walk uprightly. (Psalm 84:11)

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

Self-Examination

How do these truths affect your attitude toward your marriage?

DIG DEEPER

Identify the principles in these Scriptures and what is promised to you.

Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life. And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart.
(Galatians 6:7-9)

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 1:3-4)

Question Past Experience

Many of us suspect that our parents used a “hit-and-miss” philosophy for solving problems in their marriage.

Looking back at life with your parents, do you believe that they had an effective biblical plan for tending to each other? ___ Yes ___ No

Are the methods in your own marriage (attitudes, expectations, and communications) all based on biblical principles? ___ Yes ___ No

Typically people copy the good things their parents did, throw out the bad, and make up the rest. That means most of our choices come from our personality and experience. Since both husband and wife did not have the same types of examples, each brings their past into the present, and then they wrestle through trying to work out a mutually acceptable approach to marriage. In this case, mutuality becomes unachievable because of their different personal viewpoints, and many destructive habits develop along the way.

Understanding all this, we should be eager to learn the crucial first principle for an effective marriage: it is essential to depend on God’s Word. Such logic as, “I thought if I were doing the job better than my parents, my marriage would be better than theirs!” is not uncommon, yet is not a foundation for success. The Bible must be the foundation for your marriage, and the process for success is the application of God’s wisdom. God wants each spouse to know that He has provided all the necessary information and grace to *anyone* who sincerely desires to do His will.

DIG DEEPER

Identify what God says about following Him or following your own wisdom.

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)

There is a way that seems right to a man,
But its end is the way of death. (Proverbs 14:12)

In this Scripture, Paul commanded us to *walk* a certain way, on a specific path:

As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving. (Colossians 2:6–7)

How are we supposed to walk? If you are walking that way, how will it affect your marriage?

Paul made a relevant comparison in verse 8. He said *beware*, which means “beware and continue to be aware.”

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

What is the danger? What is the source of this danger? According to this Scripture, what do we need to beware of?

Where should we be getting our information, wisdom, and instruction?

DIG DEEPER

Identify the possible consequences below, both good and bad.

Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. (Ephesians 5:6)

You may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God. (Colossians 1:10)

And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him. (Colossians 3:17)

ACTION PLAN

Apart from God's Word, power, and wisdom, we cannot be the spouses God desires us to be. If you have any doubt about being a child of God, turn to *Appendix B: Committing Your Life to Christ* and follow the guidelines from His Word on how you can come into His family.

Lesson 2

In the Beginning

In the beginning, God created man and woman and then designed a perfect union for the two that we know as marriage.

Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. (Genesis 2:24)

The world's definition of marriage has changed radically, but God's original design has not. An honest look from a biblical perspective will cause us to admit that most of the changes have not been godly, and that marriage and family have suffered greatly. The primary reason for this is our ignorance of God's Word, particularly His design and purpose for marriage. Even though this information has been available, people are not instructed or disciplined on the principles of marriage.

A lack of biblical teaching, or actual rejection of God's authority, leaves couples to follow the world's influence or their own path. Over time, there has been an estimated 400 percent increase in couples living together without the commitment of marriage. It is now quite acceptable for a woman to be impregnated or adopt a child without the presence of a husband or male partner. Homosexual unions are on the rise and considered an acceptable environment for raising children. Many role models exist in popular media, online, and in print who elevate Hollywood stereotypes and are leading the way in these destructive areas.

Do Not Be Discouraged

Friend, don't let cultural trends discourage you about marriage. Satan would love to paint a bleak picture, but know that God is greater and far more powerful. Research shows that among people who choose to marry, the commitment is still strong and brings great happiness and fulfillment. *The Good News About Marriage* by Shaunti Feldhahn debunked the statistic that 50 percent of marriages end in divorce, both in secular life and within the church. Feldhahn's research revealed that 72 percent of married people are still with their first spouse and that 80 percent of all marriages are happy. Among Christians active in their faith, they discovered that weekly church attendance alone lowers the divorce rate significantly by as much as 25 to 50 percent of the annual overall divorce rate. "In fact, when both spouses said 'God is at the center,' fully 53 percent of those couples were at the highest possible level of marital happiness" (Feldhahn, page 78). These statistics should give us great hope and motivate us to seek God's will in our marriages.

In 2014, statistical research from Barna Group indicated that nearly 40 percent of families in the United States were classified as single-parent.¹ However, this includes people who are widowed, divorced, or building a family without a spouse. Close to 39 percent qualify as blended families (people with children who remarry after divorce or a death), and a little less than 3 percent are headed by grandparents. This leaves less than 20 percent in the category defined as traditional family, which means the original husband and wife. Without being harsh or judgmental in any way, I believe the traditional family is the one perfectly fashioned according to God's design and

will. Although “traditional” excludes divorce, I also know God understands and considers both blended and single-parent families as part of His permissive will. God is 100 percent behind anyone who desires His help, and in these situations, He still “works all things according to the counsel of His will” (Ephesians 1:11).

Changing Definitions

Today, we are seeing God’s design for marriage and family not only undergoing change but actually under attack. In 1944, *Webster’s Dictionary* defined *marriage* as “a state of being married, being united to a person of the opposite sex as husband or wife; mutual relationships of husband and wife for the purpose of founding and maintaining a family.” In 2018, that definition has evolved to “the state of being united as spouses in a consensual and contractual relationship recognized by law; an act of marrying or the rite by which the married status is effected; an intimate or close union” (*Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary*). What brought about the change, and what does it mean?

The changing definitions demonstrate the gradual erosion of the spiritual foundation for marriage in our society. Key words in the first definition, “being united . . . as a husband or wife,” indicates becoming one with a person of the opposite sex. This passage comes straight from the Bible (Genesis 2:24). As this study progresses, it will reveal definitions from God that define His original design for marriage, not practices resulting from humanistic ideas or secular culture.

The 1944 definition from *Webster’s* refers to a “mutual relationship,” which implies given or felt by each other in equal amounts to meet each other’s companionship needs. “Founding and maintaining a family” means to establish a firm basis for promoting a certain quality of life and conduct, and for raising children. The change in definitions shows how fundamental concepts have been altered and how marriage and family are deteriorating. God’s design is hardly recognizable in many households.

All believers need to know in their hearts that God is the creator of marriage and that His will and purpose for marriage has never changed. It would be a dirty trick for God to design something so important, beautiful, and complex as marriage and then say, “Hey, figure it out on your own.”

Marriage is tough. Married since 1980, I know, it is work. Praise the Lord that as you discover His truth and apply biblical principles, and as you abide in Christ, it gets sweeter. That’s what God wants. He wants it to become sweeter every year. With each year that passes, I am more in love with my wife, and I can tell you she is with me too.

When we invest time to learn God’s truth and purposes in marriage, and we maintain and practice these principles, marriage becomes richer. God wants to be glorified in our marriages. He desires to prove His love to us by showing that He is *with* us and *for* us.

The Right Expectations for Marriage

Everyone enters into marriage with expectations. *Everyone*. They may not be written out, but they are there: expectations about what you deserve and what you should or should not be expected to give.

FACT FILE

Expectation—The anticipation or notion of something happening, an expected standard.

Perhaps you have heard the saying, “Love is blind.” Well, it is. From dating to entering into marriage, each person is showing their good side as romantic love carries them along with the expectation that it will stay that way. However, when the honeymoon is over, and you are living together, one sinner with another, reality sets in, and what you experience is *not* what you expected.

Self-Examination

What did you expect from your marriage or from your spouse? Write this separately, and then discuss together.

Foolish Expectations

I entered into marriage bringing perspectives and expectations that were not even close to God’s truth. I thought she was lucky to have me. I really thought that! I thought I was a catch. What a fool. *She* was the catch. I expected that weekends would be mine for whatever I wanted to do. At that point, my hobbies were racing, diving, fishing, and hunting. And I stayed pretty busy.

I actually told her, “If I don’t have something planned, then we’ll do something together.” And she still married me. I just thought that’s the way life was.

Another expectation was spending *my* money the way I wanted without any involvement or opinion from her. I also wanted her to stay beautiful and meet all my physical needs, take care of the kids, and keep our house clean. That’s not too hard, right? Does that sound fair? You ladies may be thinking that sounds a lot like your husband. (There’s hope for him too.)

I didn’t know any better. So how do we learn how to be husbands and wives? We remember what our parents did or didn’t do and follow their lead, and we evolve from there. These types of things can be even more confusing when you come from a single-parent or blended family or were raised by grandparents or in a foster-parent home. And then there are homes where a parent, or both parents, are mostly absent due to work.

We all marry with wrong expectations, resulting in disappointment, disillusionment, and un-fulfillment. During our first two years of marriage, my wife spent most of her time trying to change me. Some of you can relate. She kept trying to point out my weaknesses, which irritated the heck out of me. I now realize that my expectations were extraordinarily selfish and far from God’s will, but I didn’t know that then. I made my vision clear before our marriage, so why would she keep trying to change me? My wife was simply doing all the things women typically do to improve a man.

Blown Away

When we participated in our first marriage retreat, my wife and I had both become Christians and were attending church. I thought, *Oh, we're both going! Finally, that woman is going to hear what she's been doing wrong because I at least know the Bible doesn't teach a wife to keep trying to change her husband.* I went with the idea that my wife was going to hear what she was doing wrong, and guess what she was thinking? Yes, the very same thing. Both of us thought we were going to hear something that would change the *other* for the better.

When we went to the retreat, praise the Lord, the speaker taught from the Bible, and both of us completed that weekend in absolute amazement at how much God has to say about what it means to be a husband and a wife. The way we thought, how we treated each other, and how we accomplished everything was so far from what God's Word had to say that we both left that weekend so touched by God. I called the speaker after the retreat and said, "Dude, you just blew my wife and me away! I need help." This man discipled me over the following year. You don't just go on a weekend retreat and say, "Okay, I got it now." That is wishful thinking and is foolish.

My wife and I could say, "Oh, we went to a marriage conference." But how much did we retain and then begin to work into our lives? When we both got involved in this ministry and started studying the Bible, God did a miraculous transformation in our marriage that we could not help but share with others.

Marriage Ministry

At that point in my Christian journey I did not know about the concept of discipleship, a specific learning process, and the significant part it plays in applying spiritual truths.

I started sharing with people the things I was learning, and eventually my pastor called me and said, "Hey, what are you telling people? You're blessing them, and they say you are really ministering to them." I remember thinking, *Wow, God can use an idiot like me.* Then my pastor asked me, "Would you pray about starting a marriage ministry?"

So my wife and I started a little Bible study on marriage that went from three to more than thirty couples over a three-month period. God began to do such a miracle in our lives and the lives of others. I thought, *Okay, God, this is awesome.* Then I began to really press in and study all I could about marriage in the Bible. We witnessed over and over that when people are really committed to do God's will and follow what His Word says as husband and wife, they will experience healing and blessing. And I knew I could do this ministry for the rest of my life. But after three years, God led me to become a lay youth pastor. I thought someone had made a mistake. But remember, God always has a plan.

I spent four and a half years as a lay youth pastor. In God's perfect school, He did so much in my life to put me into these circumstances to equip me to teach and disciple people not only about marriage but about parenting as well. Working with youth gave me unique insights and perspectives on family. God was preparing me to touch hundreds of thousands of people. That was His plan, but I had to embrace what He taught me and apply the principles before I could see the hand of God at work and gain true biblical knowledge.

I am not lifting myself up or bragging about anything, for I have nothing of myself to offer. I only know that as I trusted God and applied His principles, I experienced what He did in my life and family. And that is what God wants. He loves showing off through us.

Wrong Expectations

If you go into marriage with the wrong expectations, and you do not know how to maintain your marriage according to God's Word, it's not *if* you are going to have problems, it's *how many*.

If you spend \$30,000 on a car, you expect that car to look and run as good as the day you bought it for at least twenty years. You believe that because you spent so much money, it would run the entire twenty years on the same tank of gas, the oil would not need to be changed, the brakes and tires would last, and it would stay shiny without any cleaning or waxing.

If that was your expectation, what would happen the first time you drove down the freeway and ran out of gas? You might get out of the car, all upset, and wonder what's wrong with the piece of junk. You could tell the highway patrolman that it just quit running. And he would look at you—a grown man—like you were on drugs or an idiot, and explain that you are out of gas.

"What do you mean, *out of gas*? I have to put gas in the car?"

After being towed to a gas station, you would find out it's only going to take you 250 more miles until you need a refill. You would be irritated. When you finally get to the point of accepting that idea, you might get a blowout. Another officer might tell you that you have bald tires. At the shop, you might find out that you need new tires *and* brakes. Another \$1,200 and you would be flipping out. Six months later, the car could start smoking, and you would be back in the shop for not putting oil in it.

If you have the wrong expectations, you will be frustrated and begin to believe that you have been cheated or ripped off. That's what you would naturally believe. And the fact is that you didn't get cheated at all. You had the wrong expectations of what that car was supposed to do and your responsibility to keep it maintained.

Today many think they got cheated in marriage. When husbands and wives come in for counseling, I can see it when they sit down. They are at both ends of the couch, looking at me like, "Man, I got a bad deal here!" It is all over their faces and body language. After learning from them what they were expecting to give and receive from each other, I can understand why they are so unhappy and unfulfilled. And, yes, we make some dumb mistakes, but a lot of the mistakes we make in our marriages are simply due to wrong expectations.

God has given us the maintenance manual, His Word. The Bible has all we need to build and maintain a fulfilling relationship. You never get to a place in marriage where you can say, "Oh, I'm done. I don't have to invest in my wife or my husband anymore." It is a continuous investment in each other through the power of the Holy Spirit.

DIG DEEPER

Identify what these verses say about investing time to learn God's will and expectations.

Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. (2 Timothy 2:15)

Every way of a man is right in his own eyes,
But the Lord weighs the hearts. (Proverbs 21:2)

The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart;
The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes. (Psalm 19:8)

As you go to God's Word, learning about His purposes for marriage and your companionship needs as husband and wife and commit to following His instruction, you will reap the fullness in marriage that God has planned for you. When you find yourself in a miserable situation, not experiencing joy and peace, remember what Christ says.

Jesus did not say go to worldly psychology or philosophies, your parents' examples, or friends, but come to the Lord and to His Word, and there you will learn biblical wisdom, which will give you godly expectations.

Jesus is the best example of having a single-minded focus to fulfill the Father's will. As you read the Gospels, you will notice that the religious leaders tried to steer Him off track, but Jesus knew the only thing that mattered was to fulfill what God says.

For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent me. (John 6:38)

I can of Myself do nothing. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is righteous, because I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent Me. (John 5:30)

My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work. (John 4:34)

Jesus came to do His Father's will, to execute His plan and purpose. Notice that His *food* was to do the will of the Father. We need to see life in that way, which includes tending to our marriages.

DIG DEEPER

Identify what these verses say about God's will and what we are supposed to do.

And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.
(Romans 12:2)

Not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart. (Ephesians 6:6)

As Romans 12:2 says, we all must prove what the "will of God" is, and the only way to do that is to know His Word.

Lesson 3

God, the Creator of Marriage

Legal marriage in the United States has traditionally been between one husband and one wife. This is due to the Christian perspective of those who founded this country, although currently, that definition of marriage is under attack. In some other cultures, man's wisdom has prevailed, resulting in polygamy. Women are considered possessions to be dominated, and they have few rights as wives and even as mothers of their children. Today's philosophy for most of the world is "We will stay together as long as you make me happy." According to a 2010 Pew Research survey, "Nearly four-in-ten Americans say marriage is becoming obsolete."²

However, contrary to these cultural norms, the true God, the creator of marriage, has much to say about proper behaviors, attitudes, and expectations of husbands and wives. God alone holds the truth of how He wants marriage to operate. He is the designer. The following Scripture defines God's perspective and the difference between God's ways and man's.

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

ACTION PLAN

Write a prayer to God. If you have been following your own ways, confess it to Him and ask His forgiveness. Commit to learn His will and to follow His way in your marriage.

God does not leave you guessing about His plan for marriage. Genesis 2:18 shows us that God created marriage and has a plan and purpose for it.

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)

First, note who is communicating: "The Lord God said." It was not Adam's idea to get himself a wife; it was God's. Second, notice that God said, "It is not good that man should be alone."

Everything else in God's creation was good (Genesis 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25), but man being alone was not good. This points directly to man's incompleteness. Third, notice that God says, "I will make him a helper comparable to him." God created the woman according to His design, His plan, His thoughts, and His ways. John MacArthur Jr. helps drive this point home:

In observing man's state as not good, He (God) was commenting on his incompleteness before the end of the sixth day because the woman, Adam's counterpart, had not yet been created. The words of this verse emphasize man's need for a companion, a helper, and an equal (meaning equal in value to God). He was incomplete without someone to complement him in fulfilling the task of filling, multiplying, and taking dominion over the earth.³

The point here is that God created marriage to fulfill His will, not ours. Adam and Eve, through their relationship, would be the first couple to achieve His design for marriage. "The Lord is righteous in all His ways, gracious in all His works" (Psalm 145:17). God created marriage as a good thing for us; we must embrace marriage as a gracious gift from Him. What many people fail to realize is that God created marriage for our *benefit*. God is righteous. It would be unrighteous if He gave you something as important as marriage without clear instructions and the power of the Holy Spirit to enable you to honor Him by succeeding.

Unfortunately, even many who call themselves believers are gradually turning away from the truth. Many professing Christians today do not believe the Bible is relevant for instructions about marriage or parenting. In counseling, that fact becomes very real. Many who have been Christians for numerous years do not know the basic biblical principles of marriage. This reveals that either they do not have a high view of the Bible or have not been told that the information they need is in the Bible. For whatever reason, they do not know that Scripture can lead to understanding and reveal how a marriage is to function.

Self-Examination 1

Ask God to reveal your true attitude toward His Word. Write a prayer for the faith to trust Him, to believe all He is going to show you about marriage from the Word.

In truth, since your spouse is a gift from God, and He has a greater love for them than you do, we must believe that He provides everything you need to know about tending to them. He wants your actions to glorify Him and bless the spouse He has given you.

A Better Perspective on God's Word

It is crucial for you to know that God's Word is the truth and that He provides all the answers for godly living and successful marriage. We learned in lesson 1 that we have God's "divine power," and He has "given us all things that pertain to life and godliness" (2 Peter 1:3-4). God uses His Word, which is "living and powerful" (Hebrews 4:12), to change us. As Paul wrote to Timothy, he encouraged him to completely depend on the Word to lead and transform those in the church he was pastoring. We must have this same perspective. The Word of God is "profitable for" guiding and instructing our behavior (2 Timothy 3:16).

Meditate on the following Scripture:

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:16-17)

Self-Examination 2

Identify how this verse applies to learning and how it could affect your marriage if you applied it.

How does this verse describe a proper attitude toward the Word of God? Do you believe it is the truth? Do you welcome it?

For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe. (1 Thessalonians 2:13)

FACT FILE

Doctrine—God's divine instruction provides a comprehensive and complete body of divine truth necessary for life, godliness, and family.

Reproof—God's Word tells us what is wrong or sinful in belief and behavior.

Correction—God's Word tells us how to restore something to its proper condition, setting upright something that has fallen, pointing to godly living.

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).⁴

Thoroughly equipped for every good work—God's intention is for us to both understand His will and be empowered to follow through in obedience by following the biblical principles in His Word.

DIG DEEPER

Identify the right and wrong ways to receive the Word of God and the characteristics of each.

But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does. (James 1:22–25)

What should be our attitude toward the Word of God?

What are the positive consequences when we obey the Word of God?

Identify what these verses say about you and the Word of God.

This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success. (Joshua 1:8)

The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul;
The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple;
The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart;
The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes;
The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever;
The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.
More to be desired are they than gold,
Yea, than much fine gold;

Sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb.
Moreover by them Your servant is warned,
And in keeping them there is great reward. (Psalm 19:7–11)

As newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious. (1 Peter 2:2–3)

Self-Examination 3

Are you confident at this point in your marriage journey that you know how to minister to your spouse according to God's Word? ___ Yes ___ No

God knows your strengths and weaknesses and promises to give you wisdom and strength if you seek and desire to do His will in your marriage. Write a few thoughts telling God how grateful you are for this promise.

DIG DEEPER

Paul made it his aim to be well pleasing to God. He was very intentional about it.

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

Write a prayer telling God that you aim to please Him by completing this workbook.

Lesson 4

God's Purposes for Marriage

In God's design for marriage, He has given us essential purposes, or characteristics, we must embrace to fulfill His will. The biblical principles below will set the course for applying the rest of this workbook. These will be referred to often and are essential a successful marriage.

The Ministry of Marriage

When we hear the word *minister*, we commonly think of a pastor or person who works for a church. However, this word has other another meaning.

How does this apply to our Christian marriages? We are under the care and authority of Jesus Christ, who is one with God the Father, and we receive our instructions from Him. God has given us our spouses, and He desires for us to execute His purposes to and for them. We are *ministers* to our spouses, under God. This mindset will completely change your disposition and approach to marriage.

Have you seen your role as that of a minister?
 ___ Yes ___ No

FACT FILE

Minister (noun)—*Diakonos* (Greek). 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. A minister is one who acts under the order of another, or who is subject to another to execute his purposes. As Christians we are subject to Jesus. And as His children we are here to do His will.

In a marriage, depending entirely on the Lord Jesus Christ is essential. We are not to promote our own will and wishes, but we are responsible for following the Lord's will and desire in our marriage relationships. Matthew 20:28 (KJV) says, "Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister." The same verse also reads, "Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve" (NKJV). Clearly, *ministering* and *serving* are the same, and Jesus is our example. Do not mistake *serving* as the secular view of pampering your spouse, but serve by loving and tending to them according to God's instructions. When we begin to see our marriages as serving God and ministering to our spouses for His purposes, we start to head in the right direction.

Since God created man, woman, and marriage, we are to execute His purposes in that holy union. God has made husbands and wives to minister His will to each other. To see yourself in that role, as a minister under God, under His plan for you to serve, is extremely important. If you have God's perspective as a minister, then you won't be arguing or asserting your own will, fighting to get what you want. When you both have the desire to fulfill God's will, as His ministers to each other, you will be a blessing and encouragement to each other.

Write a prayer asking God to help you see yourself as His minister and your spouse as your first ministry.

DIG DEEPER

Describe how Paul and his companions ministered to people. What attitudes did they display?

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

The Right Blueprint

As ministers of God we must know His intentions, what He wants us to accomplish, how to proceed, and how to minister to those He gives to us. Understanding His purposes also helps us recognize our daily need for God's wisdom and strength.

FACT FILE

Purpose—An intended, or desired, result or goal.

When Christian couples are asked in counseling how they perceive being a minister to their spouses, they give many different answers. It's an indication of the lack of unity between husbands and wives in this area. To a certain extent, this is the main problem: when two people with the same task are going in different directions, confusion and many other negative possibilities can result. The Bible shows us that this is not God's plan.

For God is not the author of confusion but of peace. (1 Corinthians 14:33)

Regrettably, the body of Christ has not given preference to training or discipling people in marriage. Many churches have never promoted marriage discipleship or held classes on God's instruction for marriage. Yet the churches are filled with people seeking marriage counseling. During our teen years, we undergo fifty hours or more of training to get a driver's license, yet how many hours of training are required for getting married? None. Due to that lack of training, many couples, even Christian couples, can be a very negative influence on each other.

When a husband and wife disagree and are not clear in their God-given purposes, problems arise, followed by tension, strife, and division. This strain on their marriage and family is a devastating problem that lives in the body of Christ today.

In Matthew, Jesus revealed a self-evident truth:

Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and every city or house divided against itself will not stand. (Matthew 12:25)

Self-Examination 1

Write a prayer. Ask God, as husband and wife, to give you the grace to begin again in your marriage. Ask Him for the mercy to forgive each other for past mistakes and for not working in harmony, and ask Him to open your hearts to receive His instruction to work together as a team.

Meditate on the attitudes God desires for us.

Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do. But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. (Colossians 3:12–16)

The foundation for all we do must be an understanding of the purposes and plans God has for us. Once we embrace God's authority, it is essential to follow through in practical ways. God is the architect, but it is our job to build the house according to His blueprint. When we understand what God is trying to do through us and within us, when we follow His design, we then know why it is so vital that we have a right relationship with Christ.

DIG DEEPER

Identify how this verse relates to you as a spouse and minister.

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)

The Four Purposes

God's purpose for us as spouses and ministers can be broken down into four areas:

1. He wants to be glorified in our relationship.
2. He wants us to be transformed into the image of Christ.
3. He wants us to meet the companionship needs of each other.
4. He wants us to raise our children according to His Word.

First Purpose: God's Glorification

Our primary purpose as believers is to glorify God. First Corinthians 6:20 says, "For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's." The word *glorify* translates "to reflect." As believers and ministers of God to our spouses, we are to act as His reflection to them.

FACT FILE

Glorify—To reflect, to honor, praise, to give esteem or honor by putting Him into an honorable position.⁵

Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven. (Matthew 5:16)

Jesus was saying, "I want you to reflect Me, to glorify the Father in heaven." In your marriage, how often does your spouse see the reflection of God in your character or behavior? Are you concerned about that every day? Imagine how just this one biblical principle could change your relationship if every morning you prayed, "God, I want my spouse to see You in the way I act and respond because Your desire is to be glorified in me."

Remember, God is changing us from the inside, which is evident by our attitudes and behaviors. Our transformation becomes real as we exhibit the very nature of Christ to those around us.

Self-Examination 2

Identify the words, attitudes, and behaviors you are demonstrating to your spouse that do not reflect God.

Husbands, Ephesians 5:25 says, “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her.” This tells a man that his thoughts, words, and deeds toward his wife are to look like Jesus’s actions toward the church. This is a huge obligation He’s placed on us. We cannot do this in our own strength—only through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Wives, Ephesians 5:22 states, “Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord,” telling the wife that she is to treat her husband the same way she treats the Lord.

~~ACTION PLAN~~

List any incidents in the last week in which you have misrepresented God. Ask God to forgive you, and then go to your spouse and do the same. Don’t make excuses.

Second Purpose: Our Transformation

Isn’t it good to know that when Jesus Christ called you to Himself, He didn’t say, “Go get cleaned up, quit doing all your bad things, then come back and I’ll see if I’ll accept you.” When God called us to Himself, He took us the way we were. Praise the Lord!

When God caught me, I was running a hundred miles an hour in the other direction. The amazement of my born-again experience was when the Lord touched my mind and heart with the words, “I love you, and I want you.” I wondered how he could want *me*. In my sinful state, it was His love that compelled me to receive Him and ask Him to be my Lord and Savior. However, He did not want me to remain in my life of selfishness and sin. God captivated my heart and showed me His perspective for my life.

I don’t know you, but I know you’re evil. I guarantee you are a sinner (Romans 3:23). We come to Christ still sinning (Romans 5:8), “without strength” (verse 6), and “enemies” of God (verse 10). But God says that from the moment you and I accept Christ, the journey of transformation, or what the Bible calls sanctification (1 Corinthians 1:30), begins. You and I should be able to look back and say we look more like Jesus today than yesterday. However, many Christians are ignorant of how God’s process and sanctification works within a marriage. Being transformed into Christ’s image is God’s plan and purpose for every believer.

The apostle John gave us an exhortation that linked the keeping of God’s Word with being perfected or becoming mature.

But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him. (1 John 2:5)

The phrase “keeps His Word” means knowing His Word and doing it, and then “the love of God is perfected” in us.

If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father’s commandments and abide in His love. (John 15:10)

When we know His Word and desire to do it, we begin a transformation from the inside, and the result shows in our behavior. In everyday situations, including the challenges of home life, God will use our spouses as His tool to reveal things in us that He hates: the sinful attitudes and behaviors that show up as we relate to each other.

Did you ever consider that your spouse is used by God to transform you into the image of Christ? When we say or do some ungodly thing, we say, “You made me act this way.” But we can’t find that in God’s Word. God says, “Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks” (Matthew 12:34). That ungodliness is inside, and God is using your spouse to bring it out and show you what needs to change. When we claim our innocence or blame them, we fail to take responsibility. It is vitally important that we understand as ministers that God is using the dynamics of our families to purge us and transform us into the likeness of Christ.

But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord. (2 Corinthians 3:18)

In the same way a Christian is gradually transformed into the likeness of Christ and comes to desire God’s will in all things.

Self-Examination 3

This verse gives assurance that God is at work changing you. Can you trust Him and ask Him to reveal areas where you still need improvement? ___ Yes ___ No

FACT FILE

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.”⁶

FACT FILE

Transformed—Metamorphoō (Greek). To change into something entirely different, as a caterpillar to a butterfly. From which we derive our English word *metamorphosis*.

Write a prayerful commitment to accept His perfect way of revealing your lack of Christlikeness.

DIG DEEPER

Identify what God promises to do in you.

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

This good work is the process of becoming like Christ, in this case to be His disciple and the spouse He desires you to be.

Do you still have room to grow in this area? ___ Yes ___ No

We must rest assured in our hearts that God uses the differences between husbands and wives as material for training in obedience to His will. Many Christians reject this truth because of their ignorance, not realizing that this is part of the sanctification process. Marriage is a part of God's training camp.

Many of the trials we face are by His design. God allows things to heat up and brings your sin (un-Christlikeness) to the surface. Understand that He orchestrated this circumstance to reveal these things in you, not for you to blame your spouse, but for you to say, "Oh my gosh, Lord, yuck. This sin was here when You accepted me, and you're using this situation to reveal my sin so I can repent and stop doing it."

God is not allowing these circumstances so He can find out what is within us. He already knows and sees all and still loves us. He is doing it so we will see ourselves and desire His help to change.

The refining pot is for silver and the furnace for gold,
But the Lord tests the hearts. (Proverbs 17:3)

Self-Examination 4

When these trials come, what are some ungodly attitudes and actions revealing themselves to you through your spouse or children?

Consider what God is doing in you through these verses.

Behold, I have refined you, but not as silver;
I have tested you in the furnace of affliction. (Isaiah 48:10)

I, the Lord, search the heart,
I test the mind,
Even to give every man according to his ways,
According to the fruit of his doings. (Jeremiah 17:10)

The third and fourth purposes are covered in the next lesson.

Lesson 5

Cooperating with God's Discipline

When we take responsibility (ownership) for our behavior, we will ask God and our spouses to forgive us and pray, "God, take this out of me." That's when transformation begins. Until we respond to situations in this way, we will never experience growth. Often when Christian couples come in for counseling with five, ten, even twenty years of toxic communication behind them, because they didn't understand God's will in this area, they feel hopeless and want to give up.

Even after learning that God uses our relationship as a husband and wife to transform us, apart from His daily grace, we are unable to accept and cooperate with Him in this area. When we are not abiding in Christ daily, and the testing comes, we will most likely react in the flesh with anger, pride, blame, self-pity, and more. It is even becoming more common for Christians to believe that their sinful behaviors are the result of external causes, so they are not to blame. When we are abiding in Jesus daily, looking to Him for the grace to do His will, then and only then can we experience this inner transformation.

Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. (Hebrews 12:2)

Self-Examination 1

Jesus "endured" the pain of the cross because of the joyous result, the salvation of our souls. What joy do you see that makes the pain of transformation worthwhile? Name at least two areas God is revealing in you that He wants to change (anger, impatience, resentment, unforgiveness, harshness, bitterness, evasiveness, etc.).

The verse also says, "Looking unto Jesus." Write a prayer of commitment to look to Him when a challenging marital issue comes up in your home.

God occasionally uses things that we perceive as unjust to do His work. Have you ever read the story of Joseph? There's a young man that should have been in twenty-five years of therapy. He could have been on every antidepressant they have on earth today. His brothers were jealous. So they beat him up, dug a pit in the ground, and threw him in there for dead. Then they changed their minds and sold him into slavery (as if that was better).

Joseph's life was messed up, but he wasn't, because he put his faith and trust in the Lord. Joseph later met his brothers, and they were devastated by guilt over what they had done to him. His response was, "But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive" (Genesis 50:20). Joseph had plenty of opportunities in his life to say, "God, life stinks, it's unfair, and I'm just going to do what I want." Read his story in Genesis 37–50 about how he trusted God.

However, as Christians today, if our spouse disappoints us or fails our expectations, we justify getting angry and sin. All the while God is waiting for the light to go on, for us to realize He is allowing the trials for our good. While God does not condone or have anything to do with sinful abuse, He doesn't want us to excuse our sinfulness and stay in a state of disobedience. The hardest part for us is when God wraps His fingers around you and me and begins to mold and shape us. It can feel painful. The Bible says, "He is the potter" and we are "the clay."

How foolish can you be?

He is the Potter, and He is certainly greater than you, the clay!

Should the created thing say of the one who made it,

"He didn't make me"?

Does a jar ever say,

"The potter who made me is stupid"? (Isaiah 29:16 NLT)

Ouch. So many times in a heated moment, when God is trying to bring about transformation, we tell Him through our actions, "Take Your hand off of me, Lord! I don't want to be shaped by you. I don't like the ways You reveal my sin nature and teach me!" What a stupid thing to say to our Creator.

You may not have viewed your husband or wife as the very fingers of God, but He is telling you it's true. He will continue to press on us until we surrender or become miserable. Many married people are very unhappy, not experiencing what God wants, because they are ignorant of His purpose for their marriage.

The Lord has used my wife to reveal things in me I didn't like and I know God didn't like. He has used my oldest son Nick more than anything or anyone on earth to reveal the ugliness in me. I didn't know how angry I was inside until my son came along. By the time he was three, he was able to anger me more than any other human being on earth. However, God revealed to me, "It's not Nick, Craig, it's Me. I put this strong-willed child in your life to reveal things I hate in you. When I reveal them and you ask Me to change you, you will never change until you take ownership and repent. And you will not have a relationship with your son either. It's up to you, Craig. Surrender or suffer."

We don't like challenges or suffering. Many Christians think, "Oh, wait a minute, God, I'm supposed to be happy." Yes, but not in our way, because we are selfish. You and I should not say to God, "Okay, I know what I need. Here's my list." God knows we are wicked. His Word says we cannot trust our own hearts. We must look to God's Word. Jesus said in John 6:38, "For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent me." Glorifying God means living out His will and purpose in and through our lives.

Third Purpose: To Meet Each Other's Companionship Needs

The next purpose is meeting each other's companionship needs (Genesis 2:24). Again, this is not accomplished in our own way or by our strength, but by His Word and His grace. We must understand and believe that God created Adam and then Eve as a "helper comparable to him."

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

God calls the marriage of man and woman "becoming one," not identical, but the uniting of two halves to create a perfect whole. I'm not supposed to be like a woman, and my wife isn't supposed to be like a man. God is saying we need to adapt to the uniqueness of another, become a matched pair that truly meets the companionship needs of each other through the power of the Holy Spirit. He wants us to minister to our spouses, meeting their companionship needs, and create a relationship with depth and intimacy.

FACTFILE

Helper—Azar (Hebrew). To aid, to support, give encouragement, one who surrounds, protects, and helps another.

Comparable—One who is the counterpart, the other side, a part opposite, a mate, a companion, but not identical.

According to this account in Genesis, seeing that it was not good for the man to be alone, God gave him a helper or helpmate. Notice the word He used here is *helper*, not leader or coach. God created the man out of the dust of the ground (Genesis 2:7), but He also formed—literally built—the woman out of the rib of the man (Genesis 2:21–22). God was demonstrating the role that the husband and wife would have in each other's lives. They would be mutually dependent on each other. The man needed companionship. The man needed help. God provided that help through the woman. A woman would make up for what was lacking in the man, and vice versa. The woman's life came from the man, and man's life would proceed from the woman.

Self-Examination 2

Wives, do you want to be a helper/helpmate to your husband? ___ Yes ___ No (Tell him now.)

Husbands, are you willing to admit to yourself and your wife that you need her? ___ Yes ___ No (Tell her now.)

God also desires that husband and wife have a unique relationship that He calls becoming "one" spiritually, emotionally, and sexually, thus fulfilling each other's companionship needs. God said this right from the beginning.

Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. (Genesis 2:24)

In Matthew 19:5–6, Jesus said, “For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no man separate.”

God desires you to become one with your spouse. It is so beautiful to grow into such intimacy with your husband or wife that you can know what the other is thinking. Have you experienced that? That’s what God wants.

Often I don’t have to make requests of my wife because she already knows what I need, and vice versa. We desire to prioritize each other and be aware of each other’s needs and meet those needs before they’re requested. That’s what God desires. This is the great mystery He is talking about. When God looks upon you after you’re married, He sees you as two in one. The journey is to learn how to recognize and treat each other as God sees us, not as independent of each other, but as one. Many have not been disciplined in these truths and still think in a very independent way, which negatively affects our relationship with God and our spouses.

Through this study you will learn about the different companionship needs of a husband and wife. However, one need is equal for both men and women—love. Our greatest companionship need is love, and God’s Word defines what true love is.

God instructs husbands:

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her. (Ephesians 5:25)

God instructs wives:

Do not let your adornment be merely outward—arranging the hair, wearing gold, or putting on fine apparel—rather let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God. (1 Peter 3:3–4)

God has set standards for love that seem hard to keep, but would God ask us to do something that is impossible? Is God fair and just? Many people would not say God is unfair, but their hearts are saying they can’t love their spouses the way God desires. The truth is that attitude is not “I cannot” but more “I will not.” That is 100 percent rebellion. Know that God promises to give is *all* the grace we need to do His will, including loving our spouses. *Amen.*

God said I am supposed to love my wife as Christ loves the church, and my wife is supposed to love me with an incorruptible love as to the Lord. Yes, it is possible. God is not a liar. If He says it, what will stop Him from working through us to accomplish this ministry of love? Only we can stop it, along with our stubborn selfishness or lack of faith. The only thing that can stop this from being fulfilled is our rebellion.

FACT FILE

Joined—Carries the sense of a permanent or indissoluble union, so divorce was not considered.⁷

One flesh—A complete unity of parts making a whole. One cluster, many grapes (Numbers 13:23) or one God in three persons (Deuteronomy 6:4); thus this marital union was complete and whole with two people.⁸

When you believe what God's Word says, that this is what He wants to do in and through your life, only then will you become His vessel to pour His love through you. God's Word determines the value you place on your spouse, not selfish expectations. When your partner fails to obey God's will, you are to remain faithful to God's desire for you in the marriage. When God tells a man to love his wife as Christ loves the church, He does not mean *if* she does what he wants when he wants. His Word does not say to the wife, love your husband with this incorruptible love and honor him as unto the Lord only *if* he follows the Word of God.

Many Christians want to blame their anger and unloving behavior on their spouse's failures. After fifteen or twenty years of marriage not functioning according to God's Word, it is easy to develop sinful habits and want to give up. I encourage them to commit the to learn God's will and to take responsibility for whatever they do contrary to God's Word. What happens is a miracle.

My counseling has been fruitful, but not because I'm wonderful. The truth and power are in the Word of God, not me. When individuals ask God to change them, He does. When couples yield to God's words, and together desire to do His will, He meets them where they are and blesses them.

If you don't trust God, you're calling Him a liar, and there are serious consequences when we harbor such thoughts as, *You don't know who I married, God*. We fail to acknowledge that God created that person. God knows your situation is difficult, but He also knows that ignorance, stubbornness, sin, and failure to follow His design will bring negative consequences.

DIG DEEPER

Identify what your attitudes and actions should be.

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

The fear of man brings a snare,
But whoever trusts in the Lord shall be safe. (Proverbs 29:25)

For we walk by faith, not by sight. (2 Corinthians 5:7)

For indeed the gospel was preached to us as well as to them; but the word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard it. (Hebrews 4:2)

Fourth Purpose: Multiply—To Conceive and Raise Godly Children

To multiply, or raise children, is another God-ordained purpose for marriage.

So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. Then God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply.” (Genesis 1:27–28)

That doesn’t mean all married couples must have children. If that were the case, all would have the ability. One purpose for marriage is to raise and train children, not our way but God’s way.

Some people avoid having children because they endured terrible parenting, were hurt, or experienced trauma that created unforgiveness or fear that has taken root in their hearts. If this is your reason, then seek the Lord to help with those issues and to heal you. Do not let other people’s sin rob you of God’s will for your life.

Another common reason for not having children is our selfishness, when we look at children as a hindrance or obstacle to our plans, ambitions, and goals. While it may be wise for some couples to plan on having children at a later time so they can settle into their newly married life, make sure they have a steady income, finish school, and various other reasons, the operative word is *plan*. Also note that many newly married couples have children right away and are blessed by raising them. This is something that each couple needs to bring before the Lord in prayer. When you stop and think about it, if your parents had been selfish and considered children an obstacle, you would not be here.

If you feel you are not equipped to raise children, let me encourage you to go through the material titled *Parenting Is a Ministry*, which is on our website at FDM.world. Just as many have not been disciplined on how to have a biblical marriage, the same goes for parenting. If you have children or are planning for the future, the only way to make it a blessing for all is to raise them according to God’s Word. In so doing, you glorify God and can be sure that He will provide His grace and power to fulfill this awesome task.

My wife and I spent our first five years doing it our way, which resulted in frustration. Once we applied God’s wisdom in raising our children, it became a joy and very fruitful. Now my children are adults, and I see the wonderful fruit of doing things God’s way. Plus, we are experiencing the incredible life of having grandchildren and seeing how our children are raising their kids.

No Kidding, God!

Do you feel that fulfilling God's purposes as a spouse, glorifying God in all your actions, yielding to being transformed into His image, meeting your spouse's companionship needs, and raising children are easy? It's not easy. It's downright difficult.

Fulfilling God's purposes for marriage is challenging and can be confusing at times. It is never God's intention for us to panic and think we must do this in our strength. In fact, we can't do it without Him. Many marriages fail because we do not access and maintain the most important relationship one could have, a relationship with Christ. Without this, we will not have the knowledge and power to do God's will.

Lesson 6

Strong Foundation

God's will is to bless our marriage and for us to experience fulfillment, but we will face challenges and storms in this journey. Having a strong foundation built on Jesus Christ is essential to stay the course and be victorious. This lesson will help you understand how to have a strong spiritual foundation for your life and marriage.

God created marriage, and God Himself has provided both husband and wife with specific instructions on how He wants marriage to operate. Those instructions are clearly found in God's Word, and it is only by studying and obeying His Word that we can bring unity, peace, love, and the fruit of the Spirit into our marriages. Understanding and applying these biblical concepts is the only way to have all the blessings God wants you to experience within a marriage and family.

Having a strong foundation must be your first priority. You will see this was not only God's plan from the beginning, in the Old Testament, but also Jesus's exhortation in the New Testament.

A Choice

God wants His instructions to be clear, so Scripture often includes examples and comparisons people can easily understand. In Matthew 7:24–27, Jesus told the parable of the two builders: one man who built his house upon rock and another who built upon sand. Eventually, “the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house” (verse 25). As expected, the house on rock remained while the house on sand fell. Jesus had been teaching many things to His followers over time, and verse 24 reveals His point: “Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock.”

We always have a choice to follow the path of wisdom or the path of folly. There is no third alternative. One path leads to success, the other to failure.

The Architect's Plan

Many years ago, I was a land developer who built industrial parks, shopping centers, and storage facilities. I was involved in a land purchase for the construction of an office building, based on a cost analysis that looked profitable. However, when the architect finished the plans, the foundation was four times larger than what was expected, adding additional expenses.

When questioned, the architect explained that about thirty feet under the crust of this land was a fault line resulting in a level of mud. In his expert opinion, the only way to build safely required a massive foundation to support the building. By this time in my career, I had completed various projects representing more than one million square feet of construction, and I could have chosen to follow my own experience rather than the architect's advice. Imagine what would have happened if I had taken those plans and decided to build according to my past experience.

If I choose to shrink the foundation to what I thought would be adequate, the problems would have been devastating. As storms and earthquakes hit, the foundation would have cracked.

Deterioration would have meant the slab would eventually break, cracks would begin to appear in the windows, the door jambs would get to the point where the doors would not close, the staircase would start cracking, and the elevator shaft would not line up. Eventually, the building would be condemned as unsafe because of the weak foundation and resulting damage.

I would have been foolish to ignore the architect for any reason, be it greed, pride, or even putting faith in my own experience. To follow anything but the architect's plan for a strong foundation would have resulted in disaster. Same is true for us as believers when we are ignorant of or ignore the instructions of God. It is not enough for us to be "hearers," but we must be "doers" (James 1:22) if we are to build a strong foundation for our lives. It is always foolish for us to question or ignore the architect of our faith, Jesus Christ.

Scripture reveals information about God's design for a strong foundation that we need to study and follow, because a building is only as good as the foundation on which it stands. Your life could look good for a time while ignoring this truth, but storms would come. The storms of trouble eventually reveal the true nature of your foundation.

Priorities in Place

Jesus told us, "But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you" (Matthew 6:33). When interpreting "all these things" you need to consider that this sermon starts at Matthew 5:1, known as the Sermon on the Mount. The immediate context (verse 31) speaks of food, drink, and clothing. If Christ will take care of those needs when we seek Him first, how much more will He give us all things for our marriages.

Seeking God and His kingdom is to be our top priority as believers, and as such, it is the foundation for life. As husbands and wives, you are also ministers of God to your spouses and face the added challenge of fulfilling His will in all things pertaining to your family. We accomplish this by putting the issues of life in perspective and by prioritizing our choices according to what God says is important. To truly fulfill God's purposes, we must look to Him daily for strength to accomplish this task.

FACT FILE

Seek first—A command to do and never stop. The promise is that when you do, "all these things shall be added to you."

Most of us would agree that it is essential for a pastor to have a strong, intimate relationship with the Lord. We would expect him to get up every day and spend time studying and praying, seeking wisdom and guidance from God to lead his family and congregation. If he did not, we would question his dedication as we recognize the need for God's empowerment and direction to fulfill his responsibilities.

You may quickly put those expectations on your pastor, but consider yourself. Since God looks upon ministering to your spouse and children with the same importance that he places on a pastor's relationship to his congregation, is it not just as urgent for you to seek God every day? Is it not necessary for you to build that strong foundation, that relationship with Christ where you get the strength and wisdom needed to glorify God in your family? Experience and Scripture tell us that if we do not read the Word and pray daily, the old sin nature begins to show up, bringing chaos and destruction into our lives.

Weak Foundation—Family Problems

When we look at families throughout the world, we see that they are in trouble. The divorce rate within the church is increasing, while kids are killing each other, abusing drugs, and experimenting with sex. Many are even walking away from the faith. One book says this concerning children in America:

Somewhere between eighty and ninety percent of kids in America are abandoning their parents' faith once they reach adulthood. At that tragic rate, the fifty million children who are growing up in church today would die out to fewer than seven thousand in only ten generations time. That's sadly where current Christian families in America are headed without a radical change.⁹

Christian counselors ministering to married couples and families who are experiencing significant trials often find that the foundation for strong and enduring faith has been neglected. In many cases, this is due to ignorance, where individuals are acting from experience and worldly advice rather than biblical truth. Because married couples and parents have not been taught how to build this strong foundation in their own lives, the Christlike influence they should have on their spouses and children is not happening. Tending to family in your own way and strength can actually result in turning your spouse and children away from God.

Intimacy with God

In Deuteronomy 6, Moses fulfilled God's will by teaching the Israelites what was expected of them when they entered the promised land. Within these instructions, God reveals His heart regarding the close relationship He wants to have with us. This intimate relationship with God is the foundation, the strength of our faith, upon which we build our lives and families.

Now this is the commandment, and these are the statutes and judgments which the Lord your God has commanded to teach you, that you may observe them in the land which you are crossing over to possess, that you may fear the Lord your God, to keep all His statutes and His commandments which I command you, you and your son and your grandson, all the days of your life, and that your days may be prolonged. Therefore hear, O Israel, and be careful to observe it, that it may be well with you, and that you may multiply greatly as the Lord God of your fathers has promised you—"a land flowing with milk and honey."

Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.

And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart.
(Deuteronomy 6:1-6)

Verses 3 and 4 begin with "Hear, O Israel" to emphasize the importance of listening to God's voice. Whenever that phrase appears, it means "Listen up!" God is really on our side. He wants us to succeed. In these verses, the information was essential for Israel to survive as a nation. What God said in Deuteronomy 6 is relevant to us today. These verses reveal truths that also are fundamental to our success as believers and ministers to our children.

When verse 5 says, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength,” it means you show your love for God by choosing to have an intimate relationship with Him. Spending time with Christ is a daily choice. Being closely acquainted and abiding in Him “with all your heart, soul, and strength” indicate the involvement of your total being—body, soul, and spirit. You recognize that your spouse and children need love from you, and you may have an idea of how to do that. But God also asks for individual attention and time as you build a loving relationship with Him. God promises that if you put Him first, other relationships will improve.

Verse 6 says God’s words must be in our hearts, which means reading Scripture regularly—and obeying it. To exemplify Christ and teach others, we must have an intimate knowledge of God’s will. That and dependence on Christ’s wisdom and strength are the foundation needed to fulfill the challenging responsibilities of ministering to our spouses and guiding our children to godly maturity. Our daily practice of devotion and communication with God directly relates to success.

FACT FILE

Heart—Lebab (Hebrew). Heart, mind, inner person. The primary usage of this word describes the entire disposition of the inner person.¹⁰

Heart—Kardia (Greek). The seat of the desires, feelings, affections, passions, impulses; the heart or mind.¹¹

DIG DEEPER

Describe we are to do with God’s Word.

With my whole heart I have sought You;
Oh, let me not wander from Your commandments!
Your word I have hidden in my heart,
That I might not sin against You. (Psalm 119:10–11)

Describe how these principles can help you be a better spouse. List two ways for each verse.

But the word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may do it.
(Deuteronomy 30:14)

The law of his God is in his heart;
None of his steps shall slide. (Psalm 37:31)

I delight to do Your will, O my God,
And Your law is within my heart. (Psalm 40:8)

Sadly, many people in the body of Christ have never been disciplined in the truth that intimacy with God (the Father, the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit) is proportionate to the amount of effort put into seeking Him. Intimacy requires time in His Word, praying, and fellowshiping with other believers. The word *disciplined* indicates that one Christian (or several), perhaps more mature in the faith, has come alongside to help another develop intimacy with the Lord. Without a guide, the pathway can be difficult to follow.

You may believe but also wonder how it's possible to develop a relationship with an invisible God. You may evaluate your relationship with God and wonder if there's something more than going to church on Sunday, praying the prayer of salvation, and changing some bad habits. Yes, *there is more*, and you can go deeper in your relationship to God.

Lesson 7

Three Essential Ingredients

Jesus described the importance of having a strong foundation in three essential ingredients.

But why do you call Me “Lord, Lord,” and not do the things which I say? Whoever comes to Me, and hears My sayings and does them, I will show you whom he is like: He is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid the foundation on the rock. And when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently against that house, and could not shake it, for it was founded on the rock. But he who heard and did nothing is like a man who built a house on the earth without a foundation, against which the stream beat vehemently; and immediately it fell. And the ruin of that house was great. (Luke 6:46–49)

Receiving Jesus Christ

First, He said, “Whoever comes to Me,” which indicates where we are to build. The Bible is clear that Jesus is our foundation.

For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. (1 Corinthians 3:11)

There must be a time in life when you sought forgiveness for your sins and asked Jesus Christ to come into your life as Lord and Savior. Merely being born in America and attending a church do not make you a Christian. That requires a decision to repent from sin and turn the control of your life over to God through Jesus Christ.

But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name. (John 1:12)

Daily Relationship with Christ

Second, the passage in Luke says, “Whoever . . . hears My sayings,” which refers to the tools we use for building, which are God’s Word and prayer. You must decide to regularly spend time reading and meditating on God’s Word, really listening to what God is saying. Through God’s Word and prayer, we get to know Him and understand His love and how to live correctly.

I have been crucified with Christ: it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me. (Galatians 2:20)

Obeying God’s Word

Third, we must live out or obey God’s Word. When Jesus said, “Whoever . . . hears my sayings and does them,” He was describing the person who is doing God’s will. This process of hearing and doing means to obey, or apply His Word to life.

Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit ... through the Word of God which lives and abides forever. (1 Peter 1:22–23)

Write the three ingredients in your own words.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Scripture tells us that it is important to continually examine our intentions and actions.

Let us search out and examine our ways,
And turn back to the Lord. (Lamentations 3:40)

Self-Examination

Describe how you conduct your daily relationship with God in the areas of prayer and reading His Word and applying it. How would you describe the quality of your spiritual foundation?

ACTION PLAN

After learning these principles, are confession and asking forgiveness needed? Write your prayer and commitment to start each day with Him.

Jesus as the Foundation

Let's examine the three ingredients Jesus emphasized in Luke 6:46–49.

Have you agreed with God concerning the gospel, that you are a sinner and that Christ died on the cross as payment for those sins, that He was buried and rose again on the third day (1 Corinthians 15:3–4)? ___ Yes ___ No

Have you asked God to forgive your sins and invited Jesus into your heart, to be Lord and Savior of your life? __ Yes __ No

This is the first essential step for building a strong foundation. You cannot skip this one, because Christ is the foundation for our faith. If you are still unsure, review *Appendix B: Committing Your Life to Christ* for further explanation.

If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.
(Romans 10:9–10)

You can pray now to invite Him into your heart with simple prayer like this:

Lord Jesus, I confess that I am a sinner, and I am coming to You to be forgiven. I believe You paid the price for my sin by dying on the cross, and I believe You were buried and rose from the dead on the third day. Thank You for Your sacrifice. Please come into my heart, fill me with Your Holy Spirit, and help me to be Your disciple. Thank You for forgiving me and coming into my life. Thank You that I am now a child of God and that I am going to heaven. Amen.

The Importance of Prayer

After choosing to build your life on faith in Jesus Christ, the next two ingredients refer to following Christ by establishing priorities. Let's consider the practice of prayer. Prayer is commonly believed as an attempt to enlist God's power to alter circumstances, but God is more interested in having constant mental communion with us. Prayer is a function of thought, but more than that, it is an open channel of communication with God that involves both speaking and listening. God wants you to know that He is available for all things at all times.

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. (Philippians 4:6)

God desires constant awareness of His presence and continuous communication, and He also wants you to spend quiet, private time with Him each day. In Psalm 5:3, David said, "My voice You shall hear in the morning, O Lord; in the morning I will direct it to You, and I will look up."

Prayer and study of the Bible are essential elements for growth in the Christian life. This time of study and communication is often referred to as a devotion. To become truly engaged beyond the written word requires an aspect of imagination called faith—to believe though we cannot see. In John 20:29, Jesus said, "Because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

In Matthew 6:9–13, called the Lord's Prayer, Jesus Himself gave us an example of how He prayed and revealed some basic aspects to be considered in prayer.

The following prayer is an example to help you understand the simplicity of heartfelt communication inspired by elements of the Lord's Prayer and can be used to begin your devotional time.

Lord Jesus, I thank and praise You for desiring to be close to me, for wanting to spend time with me. I thank You for Your love and faithfulness, and I praise You, the creator God and sustainer of all things. I am asking for the grace to walk in obedience today, to love my spouse and children, and to tend to them according to Your Word. Help me to forgive anyone who hurts me today, and give me the grace to ask for forgiveness when I fail to represent You. And, Jesus, please open my heart to receive Your Word this morning. I'm asking for understanding, to know You more, and for grace to be obedient. Amen.

It is important to begin your devotional time with prayer, perhaps one similar to this. You may be tempted to use prepared prayers, but God's greatest desire is to just talk with you. After all, He already knows what is in your heart and loves you in spite of what you have done. Romans 5:8 says, "God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." As you spend time each day with God, you will begin to feel comfortable in His love, and praying will become "talking to Him" about everything.

ACTION PLAN 2

Write a prayer to God, asking for help in developing an intimate, open prayer life with Him. Remember that it is only by faith in Christ that we are given access to the Father. In John 14:6, Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me."

Read through this prayer that Paul offered for the Ephesians. The pronouns are changed to make it personal to you. Make it more personal by placing your name where the blank line appears.

For this reason I [] bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that He would grant [me], according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in [my heart] through faith; that [I], being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height—to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that [I] may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that [I] ask or think, according to the power that works in [me], to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen. (Ephesians 3:14–21)

List specific requests or praises Paul included in his prayer.

Along with personalizing this prayer, you can also use it regularly to pray these things into the lives of your spouse and children, and other loved ones, by inserting their names.

God desires a relationship, which requires you to believe the gospel and commit your life to Jesus as Lord and Savior and choose to set aside time for prayer and reading His Word. Living the Christian life, sometimes referred to as “abiding in Christ,” involves listening to God through reading and meditating on His Word. In Matthew 4:4, Jesus said, “Man shall not live bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.” Your pastor might be an extraordinary teacher, but living for a week on a Sunday message alone will lead to being spiritually feeble.

Many Christians put daily devotional booklets, such as *Our Daily Bread*, in the bathroom or beside the bed to grab a quick dose of spiritual energy. They pull it out, read a little, and think they did their thing. However, a quick meal like this wears off soon, as does the memory of what we read. In our culture we have so many gadgets to help us multitask that often our time with God becomes just part of the daily mix. If we do not actively pursue daily time alone with God, including focused study, meditation, and prayer, then we may fall into the grab-a-quick-bite category, which inevitably will lead to poor spiritual health.

DIG DEEPER

Study the following verses and write what they say about the attitude we should have when reading the Word and seeking wisdom from God.

The heart of the prudent acquires knowledge,
And the ear of the wise seeks knowledge. (Proverbs 18:15)

Buy the truth, and do not sell it,
Also wisdom and instruction and understanding. (Proverbs 23:23)

That you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God. (Colossians 1:10)

To avoid the quick study, cultivate the habit of meditating on the Word of God. Many people think of Hindu prayers when they hear the word *meditation*, but it's a term used by the God of the Bible. Meditating is a way of conversing with God without words. When we stop to meditate on what we are reading, we develop the skill of listening responsively in our thoughts about what God is saying. The Bible says to "be still" before God so He can communicate with us.

I will meditate on Your precepts,
And contemplate Your ways. (Psalm 119:15)

FACT FILE

Meditate—In the biblical world, meditation was not a silent practice. It meant 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.

DIG DEEPER

Identify what God told Joshua to do and why it was so important to God and to Joshua's success.

This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success. (Joshua 1:8)

Do you want to have "good success" in your marriage? ___ Yes ___ No

Describe what this passage means to you. How would taking this to heart and living like this affect your marriage?

Blessed is the man
Who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly,
Nor stands in the path of sinners,
Nor sits in the seat of the scornful;
But his delight is in the law of the Lord,
And in His law he meditates day and night.
He shall be like a tree,
Planted by the rivers of water,
That brings forth its fruit in its season,

Whose leaf also shall not wither;
And whatever he does shall prosper. (Psalm 1:1-3)

Lesson 8

God Wants Your Affection

When children are young, dependence on mom and dad can make them uncomfortable or fearful when left in another's care. When mom or dad return, there is great affection and rejoicing. Over time, a healthy parent-child relationship produces a deep and mutually delightful love. As children mature, they become more independent, and the excitement over these reunions fade. Perhaps a simple greeting like "Hi, Mom" or "Hey, Dad," or maybe not much at all. In these reunions, the presence of parents is typically taken for granted or is not acknowledged at all.

We can do the same thing with the Lord. When we first come to Christ, we cannot wait to pray and get into the Word. When we read it, we feel God speaking right to our hearts. Often we experience wonderful emotions and even share our good news with friends and loved ones. Beware of falling into that state of mind when the Word of God becomes secondary to other interests, when the business of life becomes more important than our time with God.

If we are not watchful, our attitudes can become "Yeah, yeah, studying Matthew again. Been there, done that." Sadly, we lose the attitude of "Daddy's here!" We cannot stay in this state of mind. We have the blessed privilege of going into the Holy of Holies with a God who wants us to call Him "Daddy" as Romans 8:15 says, "Abba, Father." We hear Him whisper awesome truths and tell us how wonderful and important we are to Him.

Self-Examination 1

When was the last time you sat quietly with the living God, excited for Him to speak to you?

After Jesus gave up His Spirit on the cross, the first event recorded in the Bible was the ripping of the veil, from top to bottom, which covered the entrance to a temple chamber called the Holy of Holies (Matthew 27:51). It meant that Christ's sacrificial death ended our separation from God. Before that, only the high priest could enter there once a year bearing sacrificial animal blood. A great price was paid when Christ offered His own blood for our deliverance. Hebrews 10:19 says, "Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus," assuring us that Jesus's death was not only to defeat the power of sin but to buy a way for the Father to have intimate fellowship with us. We must not "neglect so great a salvation" (Hebrews 2:3).

If you have grown children, how blessed are you when they want to spend time with you? Do you think God is any different? He loves it when you and I call "time-out" and say, "Daddy, this is Your time, mine and Yours, right now, and I'm not going to let anything get in the way. I'm going to protect this, God."

When we make this commitment to set time aside for God, distractions seem to come out of the woodwork. If not interruptions from family and phones, then the mind floods with thoughts: a problem at work, the bills, your spouse, your kids, etc. Many times Satan sends those distractions because he knows our firm foundation, the strength of our faith, does not come from ourselves, or just desiring to be the best dad, mom, or spouse, but from our relationship with Christ. Everything good grows out of this relationship.

DIG DEEPER

Describe what these verses say about the battle we are in and what we are supposed to do.

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. (2 Corinthians 10:3-5)

When Jesus explained the parable of the sower to His disciples (Mark 4:13-20), He wanted them to know about Satan's strategy. How would this Scripture relate to your time in the Word? What is the battle?

And these are the ones by the wayside where the word is sown. When they hear, Satan comes immediately and takes away the word that was sown in their hearts. (Mark 4:15)

When Paul wrote 2 Corinthians 11:3, he referred to Genesis 3, which describes how sin entered the world when Eve listened to Satan's lies. Paul's fear was that Satan, in the same way, would corrupt (spoil, subvert, or destroy) the new believers' minds from the simplicity (purity, sincerity, or "singleness of heart")¹² that they had in their relationship with Christ.

But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. (2 Corinthians 11:3)

Eve was deceived (led into error) by Satan's craftiness (cunning shrewdness) so that she believed a lie to be the truth. Satan's plan is always the same.

Self-Examination 2

What lies have you believed regarding God's desire to be in a close relationship with you?

List some common thoughts that come when starting or doing your devotions, and ask for God's help to combat them.

Satan cannot be blamed for everything. Sometimes we are at fault. As Jesus prayed in the garden, agonizing because He faced going to the cross, His disciples slept when they should have been praying with Him. Jesus warned them about the weakness of the flesh.

Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak. (Matthew 26:41)

Jesus's command is to "watch and pray," and the result is for our good—that we are not overwhelmed by temptation and our laziness. Praying is an essential discipline to fight the battle against such thoughts as *I just don't feel like it, I'm tired, I don't care, or There's no time*. Nonnegotiable priorities in seeking the Lord must replace complacency.

DIG DEEPER

Describe what these verses are instructing you to do.

Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. (1 Peter 5:8)

Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. (Ephesians 6:11)

All your success, including the power to minister as a husband or wife, comes from a continuous relationship with Christ. Mark 4:34 says, “And when they were alone, He explained all things to His disciples.” Spending time with Jesus in daily devotions and prayer will give us great insights and understanding from Scripture, as well as the power and wisdom we need for our marriages.

God loves each of us the same, and He longs to commune with us. There is no marriage book written that will cover every situation you face. Our greatest need is not just solutions to our problems but the internal transformation of the heart that only God can accomplish for us. That is why He wants us to depend on Him each day, looking to His Word for understanding and guidance.

DIG DEEPER

Notice the disciples’ attitude when they did not understand Jesus’s teaching. What did they do?

Then Jesus sent the multitude away and went into the house. And His disciples came to Him, saying, “Explain to us the parable of the tares of the field.”
(Matthew 13:36)

God is always waiting for us to come to Him, wanting us to seek the wisdom we need to deal with life. Knowing this, how can we be too busy to spend time with the living God? We need to keep this continuously in mind, guarding against our tendencies to become independent or take God’s goodness for granted.

Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of truth. (2 Timothy 2:15 KJV)

God emphasizes the importance of being diligent to spend time in His Word, so we may “cut it straight,” or come to the right interpretation.

FACT FILE

Study (imperative verb)—A command to do and continue to do. A zealous persistence, to be diligent, to make every effort to do one’s best, to be eager and earnest in accomplishing a goal.

Rightly dividing—The idea of cutting something straight as you would in carpentry or masonry, or with cutting a piece of cloth to be sewn together.

What grade would you give yourself in your daily devotional time? _____

What do you think God means here by the word *ashamed*?

ACTION PLAN 1

Meditate on this verse from Timothy. Write a prayer to the Lord, asking for specific help to follow His instructions.

Identify the exhortation in this verse.

Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble. (2 Peter 1:10)

Obedience Is Action

The third ingredient necessary to build a strong foundation for life is obedience, or the decision to act according to God's truth and revealed will.

Whoever . . . hears My sayings and does them . . . is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid the foundation on the rock. And when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently against that house, and could not shake it, for it was founded on the rock. (Luke 6:47-48)

We need to treat the Bible as the words of God. In Old Testament times, the Jews considered the name of God so sacred that they dared not to speak it. We need to realize how incredibly blessed we are that God's grace, shown by the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross, has declared us innocent and given us access to the Father in heaven and the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit as a teacher and guide. Your part is to desire to do His will and respond in thankfulness and obedience. If you treat the Word of God as suggestions, then you may find yourself picking and choosing what best suits your will. That will result in a weak foundation for your life.

Whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple. (Luke 14:33)

Many considered Jesus's teaching too difficult to follow, so they turned and walked away from God. There will be instructions in these lessons that may be different from the way you do things currently. Some may seem hard, but God's grace will enable you to do His will. Our flesh does not like the truth that we are dependent on God for wisdom and strength.

FACT FILE

Forsake—To deny. To daily align our priorities to God's Word, which places His will over ours.

From that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more. Then Jesus said to the twelve, “Do you also want to go away?” (John 6:66–67)

ACTION PLAN 2

Write a commitment to God, to depend on Him for the grace and power to both desire and follow His instructions as a husband or wife.

God shared His heart regarding our priorities, that second to God, your home must have priority in your thoughts, affections, and actions. This is required to minister appropriately. Many homes are out of order. People are more concerned about leisure, work, or even service in the church.

This is a faithful saying: If a man desires the position of a bishop, he desires a good work. A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, of good behavior, hospitable, able to teach; not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not covetous; one who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence (for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?); not a novice, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the same condemnation as the devil. Moreover he must have a good testimony among those who are outside, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.

Likewise deacons must be reverent, not double-tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy for money, holding the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience. But let these also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons, being found blameless. Likewise, their wives must be reverent, not slanderers, temperate, faithful in all things. Let deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well. For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a good standing and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus. (1 Timothy 3:1–13)

Concerning this passage one author said, “Paul indicated that the experience the leader gained in the home would develop sensitive compassion for his role in the church.” The verb *manage* appeared in verse 4. The development of proper leadership skills in the home was a prerequisite for using them in the church.¹³

Self-Examination 3

A pastor must have his family in order before qualifying in God’s eyes so he can be an excellent example for the congregation. If you encountered a pastor with apparent marriage and family problems and observed that he did not tend to his wife or children correctly, would you respect him and his leadership? Why?

For I have known him, in order that he may command his children and his household after him, that they keep the way of the Lord, to do righteousness and justice, that the Lord may bring to Abraham what He has spoken to him.
(Genesis 18:19)

That is an excellent example of God's attitude toward the family. God told Abraham, the husband and father, that He knew him for a purpose, to instruct his family in the ways of the Lord. Notice that God did not say, "You need to work all the time to bring in the cash," although we know if we do not provide for our family, we have denied the faith (1 Timothy 5:8). He doesn't not say, "Do more ministry" or "Why don't you mount that camel and head on down to Egypt to relax." Even though work, ministry, and leisure time are important and even biblical, none is the first priority. A balance must be reached, but your priority relationship is with God first and family next.

Self-Examination 4

Consider your priorities in relation to God, spouse, children, work, church, leisure, and fellowship. Has God been first, then family? Ask your spouse if they agree with your assessment. If you have kids, ask them in a gentle, teachable manner, and they will give you a straight answer. If your priorities are out of balance, write a prayer of commitment to change. Be specific.

DIG DEEPER

Describe what this Scripture says about the biblical concepts of choosing, serving, and the family.

And if it seems evil to you to serve the Lord, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord. (Joshua 24:15)

And Elijah came to all the people, and said, "How long will you falter between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him." But the people answered him not a word. (1 Kings 18:21)

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)

Are you practicing godly principles in your home? The fruit of the Holy Spirit is "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control" (Galatians 5:22-23 NLT). Are these the qualities your spouse and children see growing in you and increasing in your home environment?

How would you evaluate yourself? ___ Great ___ Hit and miss ___ Lots of room to grow

If anything else becomes more important than your relationship with Christ, you will suffer, and so will your family. God blesses obedience. Disobedience interrupts God's blessing because we are operating in the flesh, in rebellion, and are outside of God's will.

Do you see areas that need improvement? God gives us instructions, makes them clear enough to understand, and asks for obedience. We have the Holy Spirit to make the Word alive in us, to teach us, guide us, and convict us when we are out of God's will. We all need God's power and grace every single day. But we must never forget that God does not do by miracles what He has called us to do by obedience.

Once again, list the three ingredients for a strong foundation.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Lesson 9

The Chief Cornerstone

The most significant aspect of building on a strong foundation is the selection of a proper chief cornerstone. Let's look at what Scripture says about that in relation to Christ, and also our relationship to Him.

Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone. (Ephesians 2:19-20)

Therefore it is also contained in the Scripture,

“Behold, I lay in Zion

A chief cornerstone, elect, precious,

And he who believes on Him will by no means be put to shame.”

Therefore, to you who believe, He is precious; but to those who are disobedient,

“The stone which the builders rejected

Has become the chief cornerstone,”

and

“A stone of stumbling

And a rock of offense.”

They stumble, being disobedient to the word, to which they also were appointed.

(1 Peter 2:6-8)

There is an order of spiritual progress presented in these verses:

1. accept Jesus Christ,
2. abide in Him, and
3. obey.

Most Christians become preoccupied with the third step. *Oh, I've got to quit doing this. I have to do something better. My life will never be pleasing to God.* Fortunately, accomplishing the first two steps brings success for the third—we find ourselves with the power, grace, and desire to be obedient believers.

When people come in for counseling struggling with sinful behaviors or addictions, the first question should be, “How is your abiding relationship with Christ?” The most common response is, “What does that mean?” Our relationship with Christ is the connection that gives us the power to obey. Our intimacy with God is what gives us the grace for that day to have victory over sin. He *only* gives us grace for the day. He does not give us grace for a week. We need to see this connection and understand this spiritual principle. God designed it this way so we would maintain daily fellowship and intimacy with Him.

Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me.

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 15:4-5)

Jesus is concentrated on the idea of abiding, using the word four times. When He gave this instruction to His disciples, it was only a short time before He would go to the cross and then on to be with the Father in heaven. He wanted to make sure His disciples knew that their relationship with Him would continue, even after He was not physically there.

FACT FILE

Abide—To stay, remain, to continue in a place, to endure without yielding.

DIG DEEPER

Describe where are we to abide and what the result is.

If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. (John 8:31-32)

If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. (John 15:7)

Notice how these Scriptures relate to our abiding in Christ, depending on Him, and the outcome.

Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God. (2 Corinthians 3:5)

Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. (2 Corinthians 4:16)

Our devotional life is similar to the foundation of a house. You cannot see it, but the strength of it is revealed as storms and natural disasters occur. We may be more concerned with spending most of our time and money making the house look good, but a weak foundation can quickly bring all that time and money to nothing. If we spend our time on mere image of success instead of growing in righteousness, our home will be built on sand and will fall, just as Jesus predicted in Matthew 7. It is the foundation that holds up the house, not the frills and attractive paint job.

In the following lessons, you will find biblical tools to have a godly marriage. However, if you skip this spiritual principle and ignore your foundation, you will go right back to your old habits. The persistence and practice of your relationship to God, in Christ, is the only foundation on which you can build successfully.

Rebellion and Choices

When you hear the word *rebellion*, what comes to mind? Teenagers? Rebellion is often associated with adolescents. However, rebellion means any resistance to authority.¹⁴ When you choose to do things your way, including setting priorities according to your desires instead of God's instruction, it's rebellion. Choosing not to set aside time for an intimate relationship with the Lord is rebellion.

Developing intimacy and abiding in Christ are choices, and God clearly tells us in Scripture to do both. He told the Israelites in Deuteronomy 6, before they went into the promised land, to love God with all their heart, mind, body, and soul. We spend time with the people we love, and we must choose every day to love God by spending time getting know Him better, searching the Bible for spiritual truth, and then, by His grace, building it into our lives through prayer and obedience.

The erosion of our spiritual foundation, our connection to God, begins with neglecting our devotional life and usually leads to the following:

1. We stop giving of ourselves and start asking, "What about me, my feelings, and my needs?"
2. We begin to wallow in self-pity and exhibit conditional, rather than unconditional, love.
3. We stop hungering (seeking) for holiness.
4. We begin to justify our sinful attitudes, behavior, and selfishness toward our spouse and others.
5. We start blaming others for our misery, sinful attitudes, and behaviors.

Self-Examination

Are you exhibiting any of these types of thoughts or behaviors? List them. Confess to the Lord and ask His forgiveness. First John 1:9 says, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

How can we combat our natural tendency toward neglect, which leads to apathy and sin? We must train ourselves. In 1 Corinthians 9:27, the apostle Paul wrote, “I discipline my body and bring it into subjection.” He understood that he needed to work, that he needed to train his own body to make it do what it normally did not want to do. Paul often used athletic metaphors to make his point. *Discipline* is a boxing term.

What are your first thoughts in the morning? When you are lying in bed and you become conscious, what is your first thought? Train yourself this way: first thing in the morning, focus your mind on Christ, and remember or acknowledge to yourself and God how much you need His strength to battle your natural sinful desires. The great thing is that God already knows your struggles. When you were still a sinner, Christ died for you (Romans 5:8). Now, in Christ, God can get through: “Here I am. I want to bless you. I love you.”

FACT FILE

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.

DIG DEEPER

What do these Scriptures teach us about the psalmist’s thoughts in the morning? What was he doing? How can you remind yourself to think of God first thing, before you get out of bed?

My voice You shall hear in the morning, O Lord;
In the morning I will direct it to You,
And I will look up. (Psalm 5:3)

I rise before the dawning of the morning,
And cry for help;
I hope in Your word. (Psalm 119:147)

God knows everything. He knows how weak and foolish we can be and all the “junk” we had inside when He adopted us as His children. He knew and chose us regardless. He is not here to condemn us, but He desires to bless us. We must train our minds. When you wake up, let your first thoughts be, “God here I am. Thank You that I am one of Yours! I know many areas in my life need improvement. God, I need Your strength.” The Lord is longing to hear you say that every day.

Train yourself to focus on Jesus in the first moments of the morning; not on your bills, your spouse, your kids, or your job, no matter how pressing those things may seem. Pray, asking Him for His grace to love your family and walk in His will, before you begin any activities of the day.

Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. (Galatians 6:7)

If we put God first, before all things, we will reap all the promises waiting for us in Him. Set your mind on God, then have your devotional time, but you also must return to Him in thought during the day. We must depend on God and obey when we face difficulties, including problems in our marriages.

Notice how God tells us to align our thoughts.

If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. (Colossians 3:1-2)

How can this practice help when you experience a problem in your marriage?

FACT FILE

Seek and set your mind—These imperative verbs indicate that the action is a continual process.

Seek—To look for and strive to find.

Set your mind—The will, affections, and conscience.

ACTION PLAN

Write a prayer. Ask God to quicken your mind, teach you how to seek Him, and set your thoughts on things above.

Our Sovereign God

As God's children and His ministers, we must always remember that God is in control and that He has a purpose in the trials we face. Psalm 139:1-18 tells us our days are predestined, every one of them. They were written in His book before time was created, before the earth even existed.

The Bible says, "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). We can take comfort in the knowledge that in every situation, God has already been there. He knows all things. He is never surprised. When you get up Saturday morning to find your spouse doing something that irritates you, or you see that your three-year-old has spilled orange juice and cereal all over the floor and

is making a little goulash, you can calmly think, *Okay, God, You were already here. What is this about?* When your spouse says something hurtful to you or forgets to do something they committed to do, pray. *Okay, God, You have been here already. You knew this was going to happen to me. You said that in all situations You have prepared me for good works.*

We can learn to glorify Christ in all our circumstances. Write or memorize this catchy motto and use as a guide for developing a good attitude:

If I put my eyes on others, I get stressed.
If I put my eyes on myself, I get depressed.
If I put my eyes on Jesus, I get blessed.

Post that on your refrigerator or your mirror so you see it each morning to remind you Jesus has been there.

DIG DEEPER

According to this verse, what is God doing behind the scenes? Who do we have to trust?

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)

Describe what these Scriptures reveal about God's nature.

The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.
(Deuteronomy 29:29)

The Lord of hosts has sworn, saying,
"Surely, as I have thought, so it shall come to pass,
And as I have purposed, so it shall stand." (Isaiah 14:24)

O Lord, You are my God.
I will exalt You,
I will praise Your name,
For You have done wonderful things;
Your counsels of old are faithfulness and truth. (Isaiah 25:1)

There are many plans in a man's heart,
Nevertheless the Lord's counsel—that will stand. (Proverbs 19:21)

Who 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. (2 Timothy 1:9)

Lesson 10

Amazing Transformation

Our primary goal as believers, and as spouses, is to be transformed into the image of Christ, doing His will, to become more and more like Him in thought and action. God has a plan and purpose in the trials we face, using them to reveal areas where we need to be transformed.

DIG DEEPER

List the positive consequences from these Scriptures.

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

But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him. (1 John 2:5)

An illustration of this transforming process can be found in Matthew 14. Jesus had been ministering to people. He fed thousands, healed and preached, and at the end of the day was exhausted. He walked to the Sea of Galilee and told the apostles to get in the boat and go to the other side. He would meet them there. The apostles jumped in the boat and began to sail across, while Jesus remained behind to pray.

Immediately Jesus made His disciples get into the boat and go before Him to the other side, while He sent the multitudes away. And when He had sent the multitudes away, He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray. Now when evening came, He was alone there. But the boat was now in the middle of the sea, tossed by the waves, for the wind was contrary.

Now in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went to them, walking on the sea. And when the disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out for fear.

But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, "Be of good cheer! It is I; do not be afraid."

And Peter answered Him and said, "Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water."

So He said, “Come.” And when Peter had come down out of the boat, he walked on the water to go to Jesus. But when he saw that the wind was boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink he cried out, saying, “Lord, save me!”

And immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and caught him, and said to him, “O you of little faith, why did you doubt?” (Matthew 14:22–31)

When they were halfway across the sea, a storm came up. However, Jesus had sent His disciples out into that storm, knowing full well it was coming. He purposefully put them out there, just like He often does to us. Seeing Jesus walking on water, Peter cried heroically, “Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water.” At Jesus’s invitation to come, Peter began to walk on the water. When he took his eyes off Jesus and put them on the storm, he began to sink. When Peter cried, “Lord, save me,” the Word says that Jesus “immediately” extended His hand and caught him.

When Jesus asked Peter to step out of the boat, Peter had the opportunity to keep his eyes on Christ, trusting He had the situation under control and could enable him to do something not possible on his own. When his faith wavered, and he began to sink, Peter learned about the Lord’s faithfulness and the importance of keeping his eyes on Him. Some thirty years later, when Peter wrote the following words, you can see the transformation in his perspective.

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

FACT FILE

Genuineness—Dokimion (Greek). Something that has been tested and approved. Used to describe metals that had been through a process to remove all impurities.

Peter was encouraging the church, assuring them that trials were necessary to develop sincere, pure faith. If you see trials this way and cooperate with God, you will be able to rejoice.

DIG DEEPER

Identify what these Scriptures say about trials, testing, and how God works amid them.

You have tested my heart;
You have visited me in the night;
You have tried me and have found nothing;
I have purposed that my mouth shall not transgress. (Psalm 17:3)

For You, O God, have tested us;
You have refined us as silver is refined. (Psalm 66:10)

The refining pot is for silver and the furnace for gold,
But the Lord tests the hearts. (Proverbs 17:3)

Knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its
perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.
(James 1:3–4)

As husbands or wives in crisis, we often take our eyes off of Christ and His promises, put them on
circumstances, and become overwhelmed. So often, turning to Jesus is our last move. We need
to remember that God is waiting to prove Himself faithful and more powerful than our
circumstances. We must keep our hope fixed on Him (Hebrews 12:2) and remember that He
sends us into storms because He has a plan (Ephesians 1:11).

Just as Christ showed power over nature when He walked on water, healed, and raised a man
from death, our greatest fear, so God wants to perform miracles for you as you love and tend to
your spouse. We need to live each day seeking to please God alone, keeping our eyes on Him amid
storms and difficulties. Sadly, because we do not develop intimacy with Christ, peace disappears.
We become agitated, angered, and lose our joy and strength when the going gets tough.

Peter wrote, “Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God
in this matter” (1 Peter 4:16). No one enjoys suffering. But for husbands and wives, it will be part
of our relationship. Rather than think, *God, why is this happening to me?*, turn your thoughts to,
God, what are You revealing in me through this circumstance?

Self-Examination 1

For the next seven days, write all aspects of your marriage that qualify as trials. This will identify
the areas God desires to transform in you. Describe what was revealed to be in you—anger,
impatience, etc.—attitudes you believe fall short of God’s nature.

Day 1: _____

Day 2: _____

Day 3: _____

Day 4: _____

Day 5: _____

Day 6: _____

Day 7: _____

Many marriage problems stem from not viewing trials God's way. Start taking responsibility for these failures by asking for forgiveness from God and your spouse.

Suffering is part of God's plan and can lead to inner transformation and His glorification. Our struggles come from three sources: the world, the flesh, and the devil. Yes, God even allows Satan the freedom to trouble us at times, as He did with Job in chapters 1–2. If you are not daily depending on God's strength (Psalm 88:9) and seeking His wisdom in every situation (James 1:5), the temptation is to trust in yourself. Moving away from God gives strength to our sin nature (Galatians 5:16). Fleshly reactions and attitudes are not a reflection of God's nature (Galatians 5:19–26), and these most often trouble us when we are out of fellowship (Hebrews 10:24–25) or when we reject the fact that God uses our spouse to transform us spiritually.

DIG DEEPER

Describe how this verse should change your attitude toward non-glorifying and sinful behavior.

No temptation [regardless of its source] has overtaken or enticed you that is not common to human experience [nor is any temptation unusual or beyond human resistance]; but God is faithful [to His word—He is compassionate and trustworthy], and He will not let you be tempted beyond your ability [to resist], but along with the temptation He [has in the past and is now and] will [always] provide the way out as well, so that you will be able to endure it [without yielding, and will overcome temptation with joy]. (1 Corinthians 10:13 AMP)

In Christ no trial is beyond our ability to be victorious, but God is not saying we must be perfect. All of us will fail at times. However, we must accept responsibility for our actions and ask God for help. In this way, we cooperate with God to change, grow, and mature in Christ. The moment we accept Jesus Christ as Savior, the journey of transformation begins. We will travel this road until we die. There will never be a time when we can think we're done until we are with Him in heaven (Romans 8:22–23; 1 John 3:2–3).

Read this as your prayer to God, asking Him to do this work in you.

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)

Laborers Together

God wants to protect our families. He wants to intercede, showing Himself both faithful and powerful, but you must first allow Him to be the Lord over your family.

Unless the Lord builds the house,
They labor in vain who build it;
Unless the Lord guards the city,
The watchman stays awake in vain. (Psalm 127:1)

You and God must work together with Him in the lead position. God's Word says He blesses obedience (Joshua 1:8; Psalm 18:20–21). When we are disobedient in the areas of intimacy and relationship with Christ, will God be able to intercede on our behalf (John 9:31; Hebrews 11:6)? He is faithful, but we need to do our part (Philippians 2:12–13). In order for you to glorify God, you must stay connected to Him each day. Then you will experience transformation and stand on a solid foundation. Again, God will not do by miracle what He has called you to do by obedience.

As husband and wife, ministers of Christ, the mainspring for service is not love for your spouse, or from your spouse, but your love for Jesus Christ. Looking to one's spouse alone for support will bring pain and discouragement. Our true reward comes from personal obedience to the instructions of God. Husbands and wives have been known to complain that often they receive less gratitude from their spouse than they do from the family pet. If love and service toward God are the motivation for your efforts, no ingratitude or outcome will hinder you from serving your spouse and fulfilling His will and wishes. Christ Himself came to earth with one desire—to serve and please His Father in heaven.

Describe your thoughts about this verse.

Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many. (Matthew 20:28)

Clever methods are not the key to accomplishing God's purposes. The key is your relationship with Him. God will foil the best of man's plans if He is left out of them. The tools we will cover in the remainder of this workbook will be extremely useful in helping your marriage. Remember that tools are the means, but the *meaning* comes from a commitment to God and fulfilling His will and plan. The primary tools are the study of His Word and prayer. We will be blessed with God's wisdom and direction as we seek His face continually.

The integrity of the foundation on which we build our family as we minister to our spouses is directly related to the strength of our relationship with Jesus Christ. Through daily prayer, Bible study, and a desire to obey, we are working with God as He purifies and changes us, enabling us to become godly husbands and wives. We must be disciplined, devoted, and as always, God has a glorious promise waiting for us.

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)

If you could get up every morning and take a pill for peace, knowledge, divine power, and wisdom for every situation of the day, would you do it? Clearly, that is what God promises to us if we will simply seek Him first and keep asking Him throughout the day.

DIG DEEPER

Identify God's promises in these verses.

So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. If a son asks for bread from any father among you, will he give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent instead of a fish? Or if he asks for an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him! (Luke 11:9-13)

When Jesus Christ died on the cross, He made a deposit of grace, knowledge, wisdom, and power in each one of our names (Ephesians 1:3). However, you can only make a withdrawal from your account if you use His name, and He alone gives His name to those who receive and trust Him.

How often have you gone to the bank lately? Have your efforts to have a devotional life, to be alone with the Lord for even a few minutes, ended in distraction? Never let failure turn you away from your Lord. Ask for His help and keep at it. Don't be robbed by discouragement or let your account go dormant due to lack of use.

Keep Building

If God reveals that your relationship with Him has become weak or stale, the first thing to do is ask forgiveness (1 John 1:9). Say to Him, "I'm sorry. I forgot. I've lost my first love. I've allowed life's duties, desires, and troubles to turn me from the very reason I exist—to have fellowship with You."

Then commit to begin anew. Start with fifteen minutes daily to read one chapter, or read until God speaks to you. Begin with fifteen minutes of prayer, putting yourself in His presence, praising Him, with the expectation that He is going to reveal Himself to you. When you finish, start reading through the book of John, and meditate on what you have read.

Finally, get a journal. Keeping a record of your devotional time is telling yourself and the Lord, "I'm expecting You to say something to me today." Wait upon the Lord and whatever He gives you, write it down, and date it. He may give you some direction or a prayer or simply remind you of His promises.

Keeping a journal enables us to go back and see what God has already done and what He has shown us and enables us to renew our strength for a present trial. One day, you may go back through your journal and be brought to tears because of the things that are written, by how God spoke to you.

Intimacy is a process. Begin with fifteen minutes daily, and it will grow. You will learn how to abide in Christ, pray without ceasing, and be in fellowship with Him throughout the day. On this strong foundation, you will be able to build a solid marriage and family.

For more devotional instructions, see *Appendix C: Developing Daily Intimacy with God*.

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 A

Commitment Letter

Dear Disciple,

As you begin these lessons, I want to encourage you that God will bless you as you seek His guidance and wisdom for your marriage.

He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. (Hebrews 11:6)

I also want to challenge you to make a serious commitment to finish the workbooks. If God has led you to begin, know that He desires you to finish. After reading the following commitment, please sign and date below.

It is my prayer that you trust the Lord to reveal His truths and give you the grace “power” to work out His will.

Blessings throughout the journey,

Pastor Craig Caster

Commitment to Finish

I commit to seek the Lord’s will and guidance for my marriage, to attend each class (if enrolled), to finish each volume, to complete my assigned homework, and to pray for my spouse.

Spouse’s Signature

Date

Each spouse should sign their own workbook. If you have one workbook as a couple, please order another workbook or download the full series (for free) at FDM.world. Each spouse will need their own workbook to complete the series.

Appendix B

Committing Your Life to Christ

Perhaps you have struggled in some areas of marriage and realize your struggles are the result of a weak or inconsistent spiritual life. God promises to bless, encourage, and strengthen us as we submit to His lordship.

The Lord will give strength to His people;
The Lord will bless His people with peace. (Psalm 29:11)

Write a prayer to the Lord. Commit to putting Him first in your life, and ask for help to fulfill the role He has given you in your marriage.

Perhaps you have never surrendered your life to Christ. Know God loves you and has provided the way for you to have a relationship with Him. You must simply do a few things to surrender.

1. **Recognize** and admit you are a sinner.

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. (Romans 3:23)

For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 6:23)

2. **Believe** Jesus died on the cross for your sins and He is the only way for sinners to be forgiven and reconciled to God.

Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me." (John 14:6)

Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved. (Acts 4:12)

3. **Confess** your sins to Jesus and repent (be sorry), asking Him to forgive you.

Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord. (Acts 3:19)

If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. (Romans 10:9)

4. **Ask** Jesus to come into your heart and receive Him as your Savior and Lord.

But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name. (John 1:12)

Repeat the following prayer to begin your new relationship with Christ.

Lord Jesus, I admit I am a sinner. I am sorry for my sin. Thank You for dying on the cross for me and paying the price for my sin. Please come into my heart. Fill me with Your Holy Spirit and help me to be Your disciple. Thank You for forgiving me and coming into my life. Thank You that I am now a child of God and will one day follow You to heaven. Amen.

Appendix C

Developing Daily Intimacy with God

The greatest gift received through salvation is the ability to have a close, dependent relationship with God. There is nothing He desires more from you.

Set aside time.

Choose the best time of day (morning or evening) and commit to a daily devotion with God. Don't set yourself up for discouragement with a goal you will not be able to keep. Start small, and then add time as you grow. Begin with fifteen minutes each day.

Choose a book of the Bible.

Read one chapter (or less if it is a long chapter) or a few verses, and meditate on it. In addition, you may also want to read from a daily devotional book. See *Appendix D: Recommended Books* for suggested reading.

Pray.

Pray specifically over the truths you have just read. Ask God to reveal how they apply to your life. Pray for the humility to submit yourself to His authority and to respond in obedience.

Listen to Him.

Spend a few minutes in silence, just listening. This may be uncomfortable at first. We live in a time of constant distractions and are not accustomed to sitting quietly. Persevere and God will be faithful to speak to you. Remember that the Holy Spirit is dwelling in you and can minister to you in your thoughts.

Keep a journal.

Record your prayers, experiences, ideas, or reflections to keep for private use. Write what verses mean to you and anything the Lord speaks to your heart.

Pray again.

Be intentional about your prayers. Use the ACTS method to guide you:

- *A—Adoration*—Worship and praise God.
- *C—Confession*—Confess and repent of any known sins.
- *T—Thanksgiving*—Express gratitude for God's blessings in your life.
- *S—Supplication*—Humbly make requests for your needs and the needs of others.

Close by asking God to help you to know and acknowledge His presence throughout your day.

Appendix D

Recommended Books

While there are many excellent books to deepen your relationship with God, we recommend the following to guide, teach, and challenge you.

Discipleship Books

Christian Foundational Truths: A Strong Foundation for a Disciple by Craig Caster
Experiencing God: Knowing and Doing the Will of God by Henry T. Blackaby, Richard Blackaby, and Claude V. King
Man to Man by Charles R. Swindoll
Men of Courage: God's Call to Move Beyond the Silence of Adam by Dr. Larry Crabb
Parenting Is a Ministry series by Craig Caster

Devotional Books

Daily Experience with God by Andrew Murray
Drawing Near: Daily Readings for a Deeper Faith by John F. MacArthur
Every Day with Jesus: First Steps with New Believers by Greg Laurie
Experiencing God: Knowing and Doing the Will of God by Henry T. Blackaby, Richard Blackaby, and Claude V. King
Meet the Bible: A Panorama of God's Word in 366 Daily Readings and Reflections by Brenda Quinn and Philip Yancey
Moments Together for Couples by Dennis and Barbara Rainey
My Utmost for His Highest by Oswald Chambers
On the Other Side of the Garden: Biblical Womanhood by Virginia Ruth Fugate
Streams in the Desert by Mrs. Charles E. Cowman
The Love Dare Day by Day: A Year of Devotions for Couples by Stephen and Alex Kendrick
The Power of a Praying Wife by Stormie Omartian
The One Year Book of Psalms by William J. Peterson and Randy Petersen
Understanding Teens by Craig Caster

Devotional and Discipleship Books for Children and Adolescents

Bad to the Bone: Fifteen Young Bible Heroes Who Lived Radical Lives for God by Miles McPherson
Favorite Bible Stories by Carolyn Passig Jensen (various ages)
God and Me! Devotions for Girls by multiple authors, including Lynn Marie-Ittner Klammer, Diane Cory, Linda M. Washington, and Jeanette Dall (various ages)
Gotta Have God: Fun Devotions for Boys, Ages 2-5 by Lynn Marie-Ittner Klammer
Gotta Have God: Cool Devotions for Guys by multiple authors including Legacy Press, Linda M. Washington, and Jeanette Dall (various ages)
Growing Little Women: Capturing Teachable Moments with Your Daughter by Donna J. Miller, with Linda Holland
Talksheets by David Lynn (various books for junior high and high school)
Youth Devotions by Josh McDowell

Appendix R

Glossary

These definitions are taken from *Webster's New International Dictionary of the English Language*, G & C Merriam Company, and *The Complete Word Study Dictionary*, Spiros Zodhiates, AMG Publishers.

abide: To stay, remain; to continue in a place; to endure without yielding.

affirm: To confirm; assert as valid; assert positively.

arrogant or proud: To be conceited; feeling or showing self-importance, disregard for others. Proudful; giving oneself high rank, an undue degree of significance.

bears all things: Bears, *stego* (Greek). To hide, to conceal. Love hides the faults of others or covers them up. It keeps out resentment as the ship keeps out the water or the roof the rain.

believing: *Pisteuo* (Greek). Having faith in or to be firmly persuaded in something. It indicates an attitude of expectant hope.

brag: To talk about oneself, or things pertaining to oneself, in a boastful manner; to boast.

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

comparable: One who is the counterpart, the other side, a part opposite, a mate, a companion, but not identical.

compromise: To settle differences by mutual consensuses.

correction: God's Word tells us how to restore something to its proper condition, setting upright something that has fallen, pointing to godly living.

defile: *Miano* (Greek). To stain with color as the staining of glass, to tinge, pollute, defile.

discipline: *Hupopiazō* (Greek). Used to describe boxers giving knockout blows; punches to the part of the face right under the eyes until they were black and blue. (Related passages: 1 Timothy 4:7–8; Jude 3; 2 Peter 1:5–6)

divine power: Power, *dunamis* (Greek). Dynamic strength, or ability to do what only God can do.

doctrine: God's divine instruction provides a comprehensive and complete body of divine truth necessary for life, godliness, and family.

edification: *Oikodome* (Greek). To build up for the spiritual profit or advancement of someone else; used to indicate building up a house or structure.

endure all things: To endure, *hupomeno* (Greek). To abide under, to bear up under, suffer, as a load of miseries. Patient acquiescence, holding its ground when it can no longer believe nor hope.

enraptured: *Sagah* (Hebrew). Isaiah used this verb to suggest swerving, meandering, or reeling in drunkenness (Isa. 28:7). Could define intoxication, not only from wine or beer but also from love (Proverbs 5:19–20).

envy: Discontent or uneasiness at the sight of another's excellence or good fortune, accompanied with some degree of hatred and a desire to possess equal advantages; malicious grudging.

expectation: Anticipation or notion of something happening; an expected standard.

forsake: To deny. Daily align our priorities to God's Word, which places His will over ours.

gentle: Seemly, fitting; equitable, fair, moderate, forbearing, not insisting on the letter of the law. Expresses considerateness that looks humanely and reasonably at the facts of a case.

genuineness: *Dokimion* (Greek). Something that has been tested and approved. Used to describe metals that had been through a process to remove all impurities.

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

heart: *Kardia* (Greek). The seat of desires, feelings, affections, passions, impulses; the mind.

heart: *Lebab* (Hebrew). Mind, inner person (will, emotions). The word primarily describes the entire disposition of the inner person.

helper: *Azar* (Hebrew). To aid, to support, give encouragement; one who surrounds, protects, and helps another.

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

helper: One who comes along and assists, not leads.

instruction in righteousness: Scripture provides positive training. *Instruction* originally referred to training a child in godly behavior; not merely rebuke and correction of wrong behavior (Acts 20:32; 1 Timothy 4:6; 1 Peter 2:1–2).

kind: *Chrestos* (Greek). To do good; denotes being gentle, merciful, sympathetic, gracious, and good natured in contrast to harsh, hard, sharp, bitter, or cruel. The idea of moral excellence.

knowledge: *Epignosis* (Greek). Thorough participation in acquiring knowledge, and applying it.

longsuffering or patience: To be long-tempered, the opposite of hasty anger; involves exercising understanding and patience toward people. Requires that we endure circumstances, not losing faith or giving up.

love: *Agape* (Greek). The response of God's heart toward unworthy sinners. Agape is God's love demonstrated in self-sacrifice for the benefit of the objects of His love, His Son bringing forgiveness to man. God's essential quality seeks the best interests of others regardless of the others' actions; it involves God doing what He knows is best for man and not necessarily what man desires. Agape is choosing to love unconditionally.

love: *Phileo* (Greek). The response of the human spirit to what appeals to it as pleasurable. Distinct from agape and speaks of esteem, high regard, and tender affection and is more emotional. Friendship love; determined by the pleasure that one receives from the object of that love. Phileo is conditional love.

meditate: To moan, utter, or growl muttering sounds, like reading half aloud or conversing with oneself, interacting with the text so it would soak into your mind. As a tea bag soaking in water permeates the liquid, so meditating on Scripture permeates our minds. In the biblical world, meditation was not a silent practice.

minister (noun): A servant or waiter; one who oversees, governs, and fulfills.

minister (verb): To adjust, regulate, and set in order; to serve, render service to another; to labor for the Lord as a servant.

not rejoicing in unrighteousness (iniquity): When you see someone fall into sin or make a mistake, you are not happy or vindictive toward them.

perfected: *Teleio* (Greek). To make complete, which indicates that something is in process. Particularly with the meaning to bring to a full end, completion, reaching the intended goal, to finish a work or duty.

preference: What one prefers before or above another. Neither right nor wrong.

provide: *Pronoeo* (Greek). To give careful thought to, take thought for, take into consideration, have regard for, to think about beforehand in a solicitous manner, to care for in providing for someone else.

purpose: An intended or desired result or goal.

react: To act in response to a stimulant or to stimulus, to act in opposition.

reacting in the flesh: A Christian reacting to a situation in a sinful manner, in the habit of their old fallen nature, or reacting in their strength and understanding rather than the power and wisdom of the Holy Spirit.

rejoicing in the truth: Having great joy; rejoicing at what is true based on God's promises.

repent: To resolve; to amend one's life as a result of contrition for one's sins; to feel regret for what one has done or omitted to do before God. To turn around and go another direction; to change one's mind, will, and life, resulting in a change of behavior; to do things another way.

reproof: God's Word tells us what is wrong or sinful in belief and behavior.

respond: React positively or favorably.

responding in love: Responding with the inward guidance, love, wisdom, and power of the Holy Spirit.

rightly dividing: Cutting something straight as you would in carpentry, masonry, or with cutting a piece of cloth to be sewn together.

rude: Characterized by roughness; harsh, severe, ugly, indecent, or offensive in manner or action.

satisfy: *Rawah* (Hebrew). To give water, to drench; to drink one's fill. It refers to giving someone a drink literally and figuratively (Psalms 36:8-9; 65:10-11). It means to drink all one wants, to satisfy (Proverbs 5:19; 7:18).

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

seek and set your mind: Imperative verbs indicating the action is a continual process. *Seek* means to look for and strive to find. *Set your mind* refers to the will, affections, and conscience.

seek first: A command to do and never stop (Matthew 6:33).

seek your own way: Pursuing what best fits your own interests without any concern of how your actions or ways affect others. Unwilling to receive input, which includes instruction from God's perspective or your spouse.

study: Imperative verb; a command to do and to continue to do. Denotes a zealous persistence, to be diligent, to make every effort to do one's best, to be eager and earnest in accomplishing a goal.

submit: *Hupotasso* (Greek). A voluntary attitude of giving in, cooperating, assuming responsibility, and carrying a burden.

thinks no evil: *Logizomai* (Greek). Used as an accounting term, meaning to put things together in one's mind, to count or add up, to occupy oneself with calculations.

thoroughly equipped for every good work: God intends for us to understand His will and be empowered to follow through in obedience by following the biblical principles in His Word.

transformed: *Metamorphoó* (Greek). From which we derive the word *metamorphosis*. To change into something entirely different, as a caterpillar to a butterfly.

truth: Comes from the Word of God; makes clear what is right and wrong.

workmanship: *Poiema* (Greek). From which we derive the word *poem*. To make something; a work, workpiece, workmanship, or masterpiece.

Endnotes

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About the Author

A fool. A student with dyslexia. A high school graduate with a third-grade reading level. An ignorant husband and abusive father. All described Pastor Craig Caster at one time in his life, but God had a different plan for him. Despite Craig's fear of public speaking, God called him to full-time ministry in 1994. He stepped out in faith without formal education or a seminary degree. He was ordained in 1995 and has since written four books; disciplined many men; counseled hundreds; led countless to Christ; and taught thousands through marriage and parenting seminars, men's retreats, and pastors' conferences throughout the US and internationally. All by the grace and power of God.

Although Craig gave His life to Jesus in 1979, his transformation started when he began to abide in Jesus and His Word daily. He truly believes Jesus desires a close relationship with each one of us. His life is forever changed because he pursues this relationship and is completely dependent on Christ.

Be Encouraged

If you are struggling to trust that God can work in and through your life, be encouraged by Pastor Craig's story. Don't let your past sins, learning disabilities, fear of teaching or speaking, or lack of education stop you from being obedient to the call of God on your life. God desires to make you His disciple, and if you are married or have children, He wants to form you into a spouse and parent who honors Him. His grace is amazing and limitless. He loves you and desires to be glorified through you.

God's Promise to You

Thanks be to God for His abundant promises and provision. Meditate on His promises from the words of "Simon Peter, a bondservant and apostle of Jesus Christ."

To those who have obtained like precious faith with us by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ:

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

But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. (2 Peter 1:1-8)

About Family Discipleship Ministries

Family Discipleship Ministries (FDM), a nonprofit ministry established in 1994 by founder and director Pastor Craig Caster, strives to support, educate, and train the body of Christ to minister to families. To accomplish this goal, FDM offers workbooks, supporting videos, and online materials for individual study, small groups, home-group study, and one-on-one discipleship. They conduct seminars on marriage, parenting, understanding teens, and church discipleship planning.

FDM's ministry goal is to exhort, train, and equip leaders of Christian churches to develop a vision for discipleship and provide biblically solid workbooks to help them minister to their church families. Since 1995, thousands of people have completed the marriage and parenting classes, and hundreds of churches within the US and abroad have ministered to their congregations using FDM materials. Their ministry also helps many families through free online resources found at FDM.world.

FDM actively ministers internationally in countries such as Russia, Ukraine, Cuba, Mexico, Africa, Singapore, Japan, and China. Find out more at FDM.world.