

MARRIAGE IS A MINISTRY SERIES

Craig Caster



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in the *Marriage Is a Ministry* series.

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What Love Is

Marriage Is a Ministry Series
Volume 2

Craig Caster

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

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Preface

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

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

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

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

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

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

Introduction

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

The goals of our workbook are:

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

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

The Process

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

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

Starting Each Day

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

Things to Note

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

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

DIG DEEPER

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

Self-Examination

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

FACT FILE

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

ACTION PLAN

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

Appendix Resources

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

Leader's Guide

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

Lesson 1

Biblical Love

What is the greatest companionship need of a husband or a wife? We know men and women are uniquely different, both physically and emotionally, but can we all agree that everyone needs love? Our greatest companionship need—what men and women need from each other—is love. With this being true, and our need so obvious, why do we often refuse to give and receive love? This is the main reason relationships fail and marriages end in divorce. God's Word has the answers and the solutions to this dilemma. God has much to say about this frustrating and wonderful human condition of needing to experience love.

Many believe a relationship is doomed because the love they once felt, or are seeking, has dimmed or seems to be gone. Thinking this *feeling* is the key to fulfillment, they decide something must be wrong that cannot be fixed. The current divorce rate confirms this. These same people are unwittingly destroying their relationships with negative behaviors, attitudes, and bad habits.

The opposite of love is hate. When a person does the opposite of what God's Word teaches us about love, the results can be devastating to the marriage and future generations. The common factor in all the confusion and blaming is our universal desire to experience the love that we all believe is possible, even necessary. Much of our failure is due to ignorance, not having been informed or taught about the biblical principles of love and how to receive the grace to live out that love within a marriage.

This study is based entirely on God's Word, on the belief that God is the creator of marriage and is the source of all the information, power, and grace we need to succeed. Let's start this study with a prayer to Him for open hearts and minds.

Father, thank You for Your Word, full of wisdom and guidance, which teaches us how to treat one another and makes it so clear what love is and is not. I pray that Your Spirit would show us where we have not been loving. Give us humble hearts, willing to receive Your instruction and to take responsibility for changing wrong attitudes and disobedient ways. God, we want our marriages to bring honor and glory to You, so that is our prayer. We ask these things in Jesus's name. Amen.

The Importance of Biblical Love

Jesus gave us insight into what He expected of His disciples, which still applies to us today. Notice that He was not making a suggestion, but a command.

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another. (John 13:34–35)

Self-Examination 1

“Love one another.” According to verse 35, how does the fulfillment of Jesus’s command relate to your relationship with Him? How would you place your spouse in this verse?

God does not expect us to achieve this love without His help. Notice the connection between God’s Word and the working of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart, having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever. (1 Peter 1:22–23)

The word *sincere* means “without hypocrisy.” This sincere love is made possible only by abiding in Christ (as discussed in volume 1) and by our personal desire to obey the truth through the power of the Holy Spirit who dwells in every believer. In volume 1, we learned that 2 Peter 1:3 says of Jesus, “His divine power has to given us all things ... through the knowledge of Him.” And that knowledge of all things, and of Christ, only comes from God’s Word.

DIG DEEPER

Describe the four ways God tells us to love others, including your spouse.

Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good.
(Romans 12:9)

Above all things have fervent love for one another, for “love will cover a multitude of sins.” (1 Peter 4:8)

For God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints, and do minister.
(Hebrews 6:10)

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. (1 John 4:7)

What Is Biblical Love?

Biblical love is not based on feelings, nor does it come naturally. We are naturally selfish and self-centered. Biblical love is an action, based on choice. This type of love is supernatural and only comes from a heart that is yielded to God, because it comes from Him. To sincerely love your spouse, you must first love God and yield your heart to Him.

In our culture, the word *love* is tossed around so much that the meaning has been cheapened. We use the same word to describe how we feel about God, our children, and certain foods. Most husbands and wives will eagerly testify that they love their spouses. However, the only standard by which we can measure real love is the Word of God.

We have *agape* love because “the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us” (Romans 5:5).

God has called us to love our spouses with *agape* love—a sacrificial love that is not withdrawn if the one loved fails to live up to demands or expectations. *Agape* love bases itself on the value God has placed on your spouse rather than your assessment of personality, strengths, weaknesses, or failures.

FACT FILE

Love—Agape (Greek). The response of God’s heart toward unworthy sinners. God’s love demonstrated in self-sacrifice for the benefit of the objects of His love. “God’s essential quality that seeks the best interests of others regardless of the others’ actions.”¹ “It involves God doing what He knows is best for man and not necessarily what man desires ... His Son to bring forgiveness to man.”² It is choosing to love unconditionally.

Love—Phileo (Greek). The response of the human spirit to what appeals to it as pleasurable. “Phileo seems to be clearly distinct (from *agape*) and speaks of esteem, high regard, and tender affection and is more emotional.”³ Friendship love, determined by the pleasure one receives from the object of that love. It is conditional love.

It is impossible in your own strength to love with God’s love. But praise God! When we receive Christ, the Holy Spirit comes to live in our hearts. If we yield and die to ourselves, the Holy Spirit will love our spouses through us. Because biblical love is not based on feelings or emotions, it is something you *do* (a verb, not a noun) and can only be identified by seeing it in action.

Therefore, it is essential that we learn to show God’s love to our spouses. Good news, if our foundation of intimacy with Jesus Christ is properly laid, then we are capable, in God’s strength, of building the supports of love that our spouses need. Setbacks and failures are certain, but do

not become discouraged and begin to excuse or accept unloving behavior. The important factor is our desire to improve. We can all start improving in sharing love, and that point comes when we realize that loving our spouses comes from a heart surrendered to God. This is a behavior we must choose, seek, learn, and continue. Husbands and wives give love to some extent, but the fragile balance that exists can extinguish love when troubles are mishandled. What we want is an ever-strengthening love, but what we need to pursue is excellence in love.

Paul knew that the people in Philippi loved each other, but he encouraged them to press on further:

And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment, that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ, being filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.
(Philippians 1:9–11)

Notice that Paul did not pray for them to *feel* like loving, but his words are a call to action that we can use in our own prayers. The following points will give you a deeper understanding of what God is saying.

1. “That your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment” (verse 10). *To abound* means “to have excess,” more than enough love. *Knowledge*, *epignosis* (Greek), means “to know something intellectually, but then act upon it.” The prayer is to know how to love biblically and then live it out. *Discernment* means “to have insight, or the capacity to understand” and make your decisions and guide your behavior according to that knowledge.
2. “That you may approve the things that are excellent” (verse 11). *Approve* means “to continually put to the test, examine prior to the approval of your action.” In other words, meet the qualification of being excellent agape, the love that meets the standard of God’s Word, which will then be a sincere love.

May God fulfill this in you as you study His Word. Using the above Scripture, write a personal prayer on an index card and ask God to make it true in your life. For the next few lessons, use the prayer card to begin your study time. For example:

Lord Jesus, I am asking for this love to flow through me at all times. I want to overflow with Your love in all the situations I face each day. Lord, help me to never make an excuse for an unloving thought, word, or deed toward my spouse. Please give me Your discernment on how to share this love continuously in my marriage. Jesus, please be glorified in all I do in front of and to my spouse. Amen.

DIG DEEPER

Explain how these Scriptures could apply to you and your relationship with your spouse.

For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding. (Colossians 1:9)

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)

Finding out what is acceptable to the Lord. (Ephesians 5:10)

The Most Powerful Motivator

Basic needs motivate us as humans. Love is number one, the most powerful motivator. Next are physical essentials like food, warmth, and safety. Another motivator is pleasure: physical satisfaction, recreation, possessions, and getting things we desire. Pain and fear can also motivate us, often through punishment, anger, or unkindness.

As husbands and wives, let us examine the common techniques we use to motivate our spouses. How do you behave when you are trying to drive your spouse to change in some way or motivate them to do what you want or to stop doing something that irritates you?

Self-Examination 2

Circle the motivator you use the most.

Love Physical essentials Pleasure Pain/unkindness

Reflect on why and how you use this motivator.

Take time to consider the patterns you have developed within your marriage. For example, some married couples do not even realize that they are creating an environment of pain and fear by using anger, sarcasm, nagging, ignoring, or withholding physical affection. God's word tells us this happens because we have a sin nature, and this behavior comes naturally to us as humans.

However, God offers us another way. When you receive Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, His Holy Spirit comes to dwell within you. Only then do you have the power to resist acting from your sin nature, or what God calls "the flesh." The Bible says the Spirit is our guide and brings sin to our attention. By yielding to God's Spirit, we can follow the instructions He gives us about love. Often couples treat each other according to what comes naturally, not according to the Word of God.

What motivated Jesus to come and die for us? John 3:16 says, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." It was *love* that motivated Jesus to come and die on the cross for us, not the fear of His Father. By this, we see that love is God's primary motive and motivator to get us to change.

DIG DEEPER

What do these verses say about demonstrating love? How can you apply it to loving your spouse?

But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:8)

And I will very gladly spend and be spent for your souls; though the more abundantly I love you, the less I am loved. (2 Corinthians 12:15)

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. (1 John 4:7)

Change is Needed!

We can agree that some attitudes and behaviors need changing. We can see ourselves and realize our faults. And marriage is guaranteed to show us our sin nature.

How long after the wedding did you realize that your new, lifelong partner was sometimes not lovable, or even likable? Did you consider that they were building a similar attitude toward you? At that point, couples are beginning to experience one of God's purposes for marriage: to transform each individual into the image of Christ, which means to develop His attitudes and character. You may want to change your spouse, but God wants to change you, and He will use that other person to show you who you really are. In volume 1, we listed God's second purpose for marriage as our transformation.

When we allow God's Holy Spirit to work within us by being obedient to biblical instruction, we are showing love for both God and our spouses. Colossians 3:8 says, "But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth." These are the opposite of love, and *to put off* means "to stop doing something purposely." Instead, we are to be led by the Spirit of God, who gives us a repentant attitude. *God, I know this is wrong, forgive me, and please give me the grace to take responsibility, asking for forgiveness from my spouse and to turn away and do what is right before You.*

Love: Reaction or Response?

How do we learn to "put off" the types of bad communication that God listed in Colossians? One way is to distinguish between reacting in anger, which is a response to our flesh, and responding in love, which is according to the Holy Spirit.

Reacting in the Flesh

Reacting is not a purposeful or proactive state of mind and can inevitably turn out to be a negative action. Loving someone will not be of great quality if we are merely reacting to that person.

FACT FILE

React—To act in response to a stimulant or stimulus, to act in opposition.⁴

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 own strength and understanding rather than the power and wisdom of the Holy Spirit.

There is a difference between married Christians and Christian marriage. Too often Christian couples are reacting to each other "in the flesh," or sinfully, and neither person will take responsibility for their own behavior. Have you ever thought, *I only said that or did that because of what they did first*? There is no justification for that in the Bible. We cannot blame someone for what we do or what we don't do. That is our sin nature, and there are consequences.

As ministers, reacting in a negative way is sin and a misrepresentation of God. We should not negatively react to our spouses in any circumstance. Reacting takes no thought—a "no-brainer"—whatever comes to mind, we simply go with it. Reacting is from our sin nature and is not a demonstration of self-control, a fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22–23).

When your spouse does something you don't like, you can react in the wrong way with the first thing that comes to mind, which is often shouting harsh words or using disgusted or frightening facial expressions. Other tactics are silence, rejection, withholding sex, and alienation. The list of sinful reactionary expressions toward our spouses can get pretty lengthy. When we do not deal properly with that damage, infection (sin) sets in and brings bitterness, then resentment, and we can drive our spouses further away.

Reacting to circumstances with a burst of emotion takes no time or effort. It is instantaneous. Proverbs 15:1 says, “A harsh word stirs up anger.” Yet the Bible says we are to eliminate, or “put off” harsh actions (Colossians 3:8). We are to accept this truth and make a conscious decision to stop every sinful reaction toward our spouses.

DIG DEEPER

Identify each negative attitude or emotion and link it to the outcome. If any of these are in your life, write what you need to change.

Cease from anger, and forsake wrath;
Do not fret—it only causes harm. (Psalm 37:8)

That you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts. (Ephesians 4:22)

For the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God. (James 1:20)

It is honorable for a man to stop striving,
Since any fool can start a quarrel. (Proverbs 20:3)

A stone is heavy and sand is weighty,
But a fool’s wrath is heavier than both of them. (Proverbs 27:3)

~~ACTION PLAN~~

Write a commitment to the Lord and your spouse to pray each day for the strength to ask for forgiveness whenever you say or do something unloving. Use it to develop a prayer, and write it on an index card to put on your bathroom mirror as a reminder.

Let your spouse read this, or write it out and give it to them.

Lesson 2

Responding in Love

When we are responsive, we are acceptant, persuadable, or behaving positively, which is the opposite of reacting.

Responding takes thought. We must use our minds and will. Scripture commands us to bring “every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ” (2 Corinthians 10:5).

Responding also takes self-control. We must bring our will under subjection to the power of God, which allows the fruit of the Spirit to blossom. “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control” (Galatians 5:22–23). Scripture says we must add self-control to our foundation of faith.

FACT FILE

Respond—When we respond to someone, we “react positively or favorably.”⁵

Responding in love—For a Christian, responding to a situation with the inward guidance, love, wisdom, and power of the Holy Spirit.

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. (2 Peter 1:5–7)

Learning to *respond* rather than *react* takes time. Unlearning bad behavior requires first that the mind accept the new information, then that the will to change is stronger than the former bad attitudes and reactions. Failure is an opportunity to confess, repent, and ask forgiveness. During this growth process, you may discover that taking some time to walk away from a hot situation is helpful. When those old feelings start to well up, excuse yourself to pray, asking God for wisdom and strength to handle the situation in a way that honors Him and lovingly encourages your spouse.

The Word of God instructs us to respond to each other lovingly, demonstrating unconditional love. Proverbs 15:28 says, “The heart of the righteous studies how to answer.” That means looking to the Word of God for what is right, resulting in the correct behavior.

The Word of God is truth and serves as the only valid basis for self-evaluation. As disciples of Christ, we do not rely on how our parents or anyone else did it, but we look to the Word of God and ask, “God, what is the behavior You desire? What is the truth?”

So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath, for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God.
(James 1:19–20)

You may not realize that using sinful actions toward your spouse not only fails to accomplish the changes you desire but actually can provoke them toward worse attitudes and reactions. This

pattern may have existed in your life since childhood, your parents being disrespectful to each other, and to you, which caused chaos in your home. God says sinful communication frustrates others and provokes further ungodly actions. Our behavior needs to be dictated by God's Word. The Lord wants us to respond according to truth, not feelings and emotions.

God desires that people bring glory to Him by reflecting His very nature. Have you accepted and embraced this purpose for your marriage, to bring glory to God?

He who is slow to wrath has great understanding,
But he who is impulsive exalts folly. (Proverbs 14:29)

Impulsive reactions are not from the Holy Spirit but are an act of your flesh, or sin nature. The flesh is naturally self-centered, self-loving, and unloving to others. We must begin to take responsibility for this before change can occur. Chaos reigns in our homes due to the way we treat each other. We must open our hearts to the truth of God's Word as the only standard for our behavior.

"Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?"

Jesus said to him, "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'" (Matthew 22:36-39)

Is your spouse closer than your neighbor? Hopefully yes. Although sometimes the neighbor gets treated even better. You may say, "Well, I don't have to live with my neighbor. You don't know my spouse. That's why I do what I do and say what I say." However, God's Word does not say *if*, it simply tells us we need to love one another. The Bible says we are to "put on" love. This action is a choice, not a feeling.

But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection.
(Colossians 3:14)

We must have a strong desire to love. At times, you may not feel like loving your spouse and admittedly give them opportunities not to want to love you. You may have allowed your flesh to rule and said what naturally came to mind.

By the grace of God, you can be transformed in many ways as you learn to yield yourself to the Holy Spirit. You won't be perfect, but you can improve and exemplify Christ more and more as time passes.

We can all experience the transformation into the image of God and demonstrate more of God's love for each other. The path is obedience. Take those moments when the flesh rises up and choose to say to yourself, *I feel like doing this, like saying this, but, Lord, I'm asking for Your strength right now to shut my mouth and not put on that twisted, ugly expression.* Be aware of your facial expressions and body language, which experts say is 55 percent of our communication.

It is only by knowing God's will for us, found in His Word, and by obediently yielding to the power of His Spirit that we can grow in self-control. However, we will never be perfect. Failure means

we are not complete, but we can continually grow in Christlikeness if we are confessing our sin to God and our spouse and asking for forgiveness. It is because of God's love and mercy that He forgives us. As we abide in Christ, we will learn to accept His forgiveness and forgive others.

Self-Examination

List some of the negative facial or verbal reactions you use with your spouse.

ACTION PLAN 1

Write a prayer requesting God's grace to faithfully ask forgiveness when you fail in this area.

DIG DEEPER

List our responsibilities concerning love.

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. (John 13:34)

But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection.
(Colossians 3:14)

But, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—
Christ. (Ephesians 4:15)

Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart. (1 Peter 1:22)

And above all things have fervent love for one another, for “love will cover a multitude of sins.” (1 Peter 4:8)

The Bible speaks of different kinds of love, but what we refer to here is the Greek word *agape*. The *Nelson New Illustrated Bible Dictionary* says, “Contrary to popular understanding, the significance of *agape* love is not that it is an unconditional love, but that is primarily a love of the will rather than the emotions.” We must pray for the desire to love our spouses the way God says. The indwelling Holy Spirit gives us the ability, but we must desire it and pursue it. God knows our hearts, and if your heart is not in it, you will not succeed.

Some married couples really struggle in this area. They say they want to follow the Lord and want to be obedient to God. However, they continue to break four or five of God’s descriptions of love, behaving in the opposite of this love every single day. The only way you know if you want to change is your willingness to admit your sin to God and your spouse and ask forgiveness.

Are you willing to go to God first and then to your spouse, saying, “You know, what I said was wrong and I’m asking for forgiveness”? If not, then you do not want change because the process God has designed for change is confession and repentance. That is showing the Lord, ourselves (our flesh), and our spouse that we desire to change and begin to love them God’s way.

DIG DEEPER

Note what you find concerning repentance and how obedience could affect your relationship with God and with your spouse.

But declared first to those in Damascus and in Jerusalem, and throughout all the region of Judea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent, turn to God, and do works befitting repentance. (Acts 26:20)

FACT FILE

Repent—To resolve; to amend one’s life as a result of contrition for one’s sins; to feel regret for 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.

Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance? (Romans 2:4)

I say to you that likewise there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance. (Luke 15:7)

Seek the Lord while He may be found,
Call upon Him while He is near.
Let the wicked forsake his way,
And the unrighteous man his thoughts;
Let him return to the Lord,
And He will have mercy on him;
And to our God,
For He will abundantly pardon. (Isaiah 55:6-7)

The Agape Chapter, 1 Corinthians 13

In our culture, the word *love* is flippantly thrown around. We say we love a particular food, a new car, and a new haircut, and then say “I love you” to our spouses. Some have gotten into the habit of saying “Love ya” to their spouse. To properly love another person, we must look to the Word of God for a description. God’s Word says it can make you complete so you will be thoroughly equipped for every good work (2 Timothy 3:17).

In 1 Corinthians 13, God explains this agape love, and it is important for us to take the time to study this truth and evaluate ourselves.

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

Do you have it all under control? Probably not. It is impossible for any of us to take this description of love and do it in our own strength. It was never God’s design to give this measuring tool and say, “Okay, I want you to do this on your own.” Instead, God says, “You have the power

of My Holy Spirit, but you must desire and choose obedience and be willing to repent.” This requires a continuous commitment to follow God’s Word and abide in Christ, which will bring strength and transformation in and through your life. Then, God’s love, *agape love*, will begin to flow out of you to others.

Galatians 5:22–23 lists love first in the fruit of the Spirit. When have you ever seen an orange tree grunting and straining to produce an orange? You cannot see the activity under the bark, but the fruit pops up all over a healthy tree. God gives us examples in His Word, like the fruit-bearing tree, to illustrate spiritual principles. The fruit of love in our lives is a by-product of our intimacy with Him and our choice to put on love. When we do that, when we abide in Christ and desire spiritual fruit, God promises to produce it.

Phrase by Phrase

As we look at 1 Corinthians 13:4–7 phrase by phrase in the coming lessons, know that God is not condemning us for our failures. Awareness of sin is a good thing as it comes from the Holy Spirit. If you feel convicted, praise the Lord. True conviction brings us to repentance, changes our hearts, and gives us a desire to improve (2 Corinthians 7:9–11). Condemnation is not from God (Romans 8:1) but comes from the pit of hell, the Enemy, and we need to know the difference.

What Love Is Not

1. Love is not impatient.

As we study this Scripture, God will speak to you about the value you have placed on your spouse and on God’s Word. Your behavior is an indicator of what is in your heart. You may feel conviction because most people, out of selfishness or ignorance, are breaking four or five of these attributes every day. How long has it been since you said in your heart, *I (not your spouse) need to change, and I am going to stop behaving this way?*

FACT FILE

Longsuffering or *patience*—To be long-tempered, the opposite of hasty anger; involves exercising understanding and patience toward people. It also requires that we endure circumstances, not losing faith or giving up.⁶

First Corinthians say love “suffers long,” and commands us to do so. The opposite of longsuffering, or being patient, is impatience. Love is not impatient. If we put selfish expectations on our spouses and then become angry when they fail, we are being impatient and failing to love them properly by God’s standard.

Do you ever feel impatient? Do you ever feel hate? That would be the opposite of love. There is no gray area, no middle ground. There isn’t a neutral zone before hate. If you do something opposite of what God’s Word says, it is hate. Only one word describes it in the Bible—sin. When you act contrary to God’s design, you are hating your spouse, which is disobedience to God and is sin. Period.

Perhaps you have heard that opposites attract. This can manifest itself in countless ways. For example, getting to places on time. The husband might want to be there ten minutes early. The wife might be comfortable being fashionably late. This could create a huge issue for the husband in the area of patience, even if the wife understands why he’s frustrated. It could cause significant friction as each spouse learns how to adjust to the other.

Consider the difference between *preference* and *truth*. Can personal preference be wrong? Yes. If personal preference is contrary to God's will or is hurting someone else, then it is sinful and wrong.

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

For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled. Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 5:18–19)

FACT FILE

Preference—What one prefers, before or above another. It is neither right nor wrong but personal preference.

Truth—From the Word of God; makes clear what is right and wrong.

Compromise—To settle differences by mutual consensuses.

As a married couple, you will have many opportunities to compromise your personal preferences. Sometimes we need to lower our expectations. For the husband above, he could realize it is not an important event, so they don't need to be there ten minutes early. This is just a habit, not a moral issue, so he can choose to adjust and realize his impatience toward his wife is sin. Instead of getting frustrated about trying to get out of the house on time, the wife could ask her husband for help getting the kids ready so they could leave earlier.

These attitudes are internal, but we know they affect our relationships in big ways. It can be disheartening to be driving somewhere and arguing with your spouse the whole way, especially to church. Couples married just about any length of time can identify with an issue like this.

But you can have victory over your frustration and impatience, just like the husband above. We all struggle, and hopefully you can identify areas where you are allowing impatience to rule, eroding good feelings toward your spouse. This is how sin gets in and ruins a marriage by filling it with anger and resentful feelings. We all need to be observant, becoming aware when something is important to our spouses and willing to work extra hard to help or to adjust our lives for them. We may need to lower our expectations and make adjustments in our attitudes.

Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance? (Romans 2:4)

Patience is a fruit of the *Spirit*, not a fruit that comes naturally to us. "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering" (Galatians 5:22). Are you coming up with solutions where there is impatience, or have you become rigid and said, "This is the way I am, and that's the way you are"? Impatience is a sin. For a successful marriage, you need to work *with* your spouse to accomplish God's will, which requires humility, repentance, and a desire to please God and others.

This is an excellent place to stop and reflect on your relationship with the Lord. Before you came to Christ, God was patiently leading you to a place where you would surrender to Him, and even now God is patient with your ignorance and disobedience.

Remember the phrase in 1 Corinthians 13:4 that says love “suffers long.” It’s derived from the word *longsuffering*. Notice, it is the longsuffering and goodness of God that leads us to repentance, not God’s anger and impatience. Should we not demonstrate the same attitude to our spouses?

The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. (2 Peter 3:9)

Oh, how *truly* longsuffering God is toward us!

ACTION PLAN 2

List three areas where you are impatient with your spouse, and ask God to forgive you. Then, ask your spouse to forgive you for each area specifically. Follow up by committing these areas to prayer, asking God for strength and wisdom to change.

DIG DEEPER

Paul prayed concerning the quality of love and patience we need in our hearts. What is the source of this love?

Now may the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and into the patience of Christ. (2 Thessalonians 3:5)

Describe what these Scriptures say about longsuffering patience, love, or both.

Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to be like-minded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus. (Romans 15:5)

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

That you do not become sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises. (Hebrews 6:12)

Now we exhort you, brethren, warn those who are unruly, comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all. (1 Thessalonians 5:14)

If you need help to break this cycle of behavior, complete *Appendix G: Breaking the Cycle*. As we continue our study of 1 Corinthians 13 in the next few lessons, go back to this appendix whenever you see a pattern that needs to be changed.

Lesson 3

Be Kind

Being kind to someone is measurable. It is not a feeling lacking substance but something that is tangible to see, hear, or feel.

2. Love is not unkind.

A good illustration of this word is when Christ used it for Himself, saying, “My yoke is easy [*chrestos*] and My burden is light” (Matthew 11:30). True love motivates us to act in merciful goodness toward our spouses so they can see Christ in us, an example of a loving and kind minister of God.

FACT FILE

Kind—Chrestos (Greek). To do good; denotes being gentle, merciful, sympathetic, gracious, and good natured in contrast to harsh, hard, sharp, bitter, or cruel. Moral excellence.

“Love is ... kind.” (1 Corinthians 13:4). The opposite of kindness is being unkind. Love is not unkind. Being unkind can include being provoked, angry, yelling, judging, ignoring, or rejecting each other. There are many ways to let a person know we cannot accept their differences or failures. But our spouses also must put up with *our* differences and failures. Why do so many people believe that if they’re not angry, or holding back affection, ignoring, or expressing their displeasure by using hurtful words and mean statements, that their wife or husband will not understand the importance of something? That is our sin. God calls it being unkind.

We must begin to take responsibility and identify sin for what it is. Romans 12:10 says, “Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another.” *Giving preference* to someone means considering them above yourself. Esteeming your spouse above yourself is to regard or to consider their feelings above your own and not treat them harshly with unkindness for any reason.

One of the most destructive things husbands and wives do is get into the habit of being harsh and unkind to each other, which can be communicated by words, actions, and facial expressions. *Both* husbands and wives do this. God wants us to ask ourselves, *How should I share my feelings, my opinion, or my thoughts so it will not hurt or tear down the bridge of communication with my spouse? How can I best help them understand what I’m trying to say?* God wants us to use wisdom and self-control to guide the way we interact with others. The Holy Spirit has given us all the power we need to accomplish this.

For Men

Life offers many situations where we need to cooperate, many opportunities to share thoughts and opinions. Even if our ideas are constructive, there are good and bad ways to communicate them. Most men need some work on communication because we can’t talk to our wives as we speak to coworkers on the job. You might be able to go to your buddy and say, “Dude, you’re getting fat.” And he’s okay with it. But you don’t tell that to your wife unless you want to hurt her deeply.

Maybe you are more courteous to coworkers because bad behavior is not acceptable at your place of work. You *might like* to tell a guy on the job he is an idiot for making that mistake, but you don't, and then you take that frustration home to your wife and kids. From that point, you are irritated, and guess who gets called an idiot or treated harshly for making a mistake? More than likely, you will take it out on your wife or one of the kids. That is sin.

Men, remember that women are emotional, and talking to them in a gentle way is so important. God designed your wife as your "completer," to be one with you. Learn how she is different, and learn how to exchange ideas and opinions with kindness and respect.

For Women

Women, try to learn how to be specific. You are emotional vessels, and sometimes it takes twenty-four minutes to get to the point you are trying to make. In their logical minds, men don't do well with that. Give your husband the conclusion and tell him what you want. For example, a wife might say, "I do so much to keep the house clean, and I never get a break. Setting dinner by six is so hard when I need to pick up the kids, and you don't help me discipline them. Can you pick up the kids today?" Just ask him to pick up the kids instead of explaining more that doesn't relate to your request. Remember that men and women think differently. Learn how to be specific with what you're saying and what you're asking.

Don't play the guessing game, "If you love me, you can figure this out." Remember the husband before who was impatient and the wife who wanted help with the kids. Don't be vague in that situation by asking, "Why don't you help with the kids?" Ask a more direct question: "Can you get them dressed?" He can do this specific task. You may need to assist him at first to teach him how to do it correctly, but then he can help more going forward.

As we face the inevitable challenges of marriage, we need to deal with them in the right way and take responsibility when we do not. It is important not to speak in general terms, but be specific when we are trying to help our spouse understand what we want and need. Ladies, when you say, "I just need you to love me more" or "I need you to communicate more," it doesn't explain your need. But you could say, "Honey, I would like to make time each day, for thirty minutes, just to talk about our day."

The Right Attitude

Ask God to help you have the right attitude, to understand your spouse, and lovingly speak to them. There may be subjects you cannot talk about without becoming angry and defensive, but you could communicate through a letter. Writing a letter to your spouse provides alone time for you to think it through. It gives you time to consider how to esteem your spouse, respect their viewpoint, and communicate with wisdom and patience. It could help you work through some of those challenging areas.

When improving relations in marriage, there are common phrases to avoid called communicator-destroyers. See if any of these apply to you: "You always," "You never," "You will never change," "There you go again," "You're a _____," or "You're just like your mother/father." Other destroyers include lying, accusing, blaming, and bringing up past issues. These are all sinful, unkind things that God says are unloving. You cannot blame your spouse when you act sinfully.

Paul gave some pointed instruction in Ephesians. Notice what needs to be put away.

Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you. (Ephesians 4:31–32)

He also included the command to “be kind,” *chrestos* (Greek), which is a behavior we are to pursue and *continue* to pursue.

ACTION PLAN

Identify the things you need to “put away.” Ask forgiveness from God and for Him to show you how to be kind to your spouse proactively. Pray for the faith to trust Him and keep at it, even though you sometimes fail. Ask for His grace to always ask for forgiveness when you fail. This is the only way you will experience godly change—transformation.

DIG DEEPER

Identify how you can show more kindness to your spouse.

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

Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering. (Colossians 3:12)

What is desired in a man is kindness. (Proverbs 19:22)

3. Love does not envy.

Envy or jealousy toward a spouse can occur in various forms, but the most common example is favoritism among the children. Husbands and wives may have a favorite son or daughter, and when trouble arises, the child is used as compensation. This also allows a child to pit one parent against another, and the game becomes very destructive to all involved. The fact that 39 percent of our population in the United States is blended families makes this a uniquely challenging problem. Your children need to know that, next to Jesus Christ, your spouse will always be number two, and you will not let your children play head games to provoke jealousy. God's design for marriage is that the spouse comes right after Him, with no exceptions.

FACT FILE

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.

Self-Examination 1

Is there a particular child to whom you have shown favoritism? If so, explain.

Have you ever felt jealous of the time your spouse spends with friends? It is good to have close friends but not at the expense of your relationship. There needs to be a balance, and time with friends should not be used as compensation or distraction from working on troubles at home. Spouses need to encourage each other to participate in healthy friendships.

If your spouse objects to a friend because you act differently when you are with that person, they may have a good point and are probably giving you godly wisdom. If you have close friends who are not Christians, or who are not living according to God's will, they can affect you. First Corinthians 15:33 says, "Do not be deceived: 'Evil company corrupts good habits.'" That does not mean we should *only* have Christian friends. We are to be a light in this dark world, and Jesus gave us a great example to reach out to nonbelievers to tell them about Jesus Christ. However, if they are influencing us rather than us influencing them, then that relationship is unhealthy.

Recreation, hobbies, or even ministry can provoke jealousy too. Many men play golf, which takes *several* hours. Men, if you're playing ten hours of golf a month and not making time for your wife, that could provoke some jealousy. You need to balance those things. Balance is the key, even when it comes to ministry. Ladies, are you spending so much time on activities outside the home that your responsibilities are suffering? The home is the first priority, and the husband and wife need to guard their love and time for each other above personal interests.

When a spouse struggles with unjustified doubts of being enough for their spouse and becomes consumed with introspective thoughts that result in jealousy, it must be corrected. Do you become inflamed with jealousy when you suspect your spouse has looked at a person of the opposite sex? Does an innocent glance mean something? If so, that is a problem, a sin, a matter for prayer and possibly counseling. Do not be unjustly jealous toward your spouse.

Husbands, if you're gawking and looking all the time, you'd better deal with that. Pray and ask God to forgive you, and *change*. Because you're not supposed to be checking out women at any time. Don't do it. A guy might say, "Well, God put her there," and make up stupid excuses to look. Instead, pray this each time you are tempted:

I have made a covenant with my eyes;
Why then should I look upon a young woman? (Job 31:1)

Another form of jealousy that is selfish and childish may arise when your spouse gets a blessing and you don't. For example, your wife gets a gift from her parents to go someplace for a few days, and you can't go. You think, *All right, that's it, I'm going to go out and buy something*. Men sometimes have opportunities to travel for work, or on missions, when a wife needs to stay home with the children. Be happy for your spouse when blessings come to them.

We all know how jealousy feels, and when you feel it be sure to check yourself for a reason. *God, what is the motive behind my attitude? Is it selfishness, or is there a real lack of balance in the relationship?* You cannot have a healthy marriage where jealousy is being practiced. If you are the recipient, consider whether your attitude or behavior is provoking your spouse.

One man had been divorced for many years and eventually married a lovely lady. He had employed a secretary for six years who was single and cute, and his routine was to work at least four nights a week until seven o'clock. His new wife expressed displeasure with this, even though she was aware of it during their dating period. The husband was confused by her jealousy, standing on the fact that she worked as his secretary for six years. In counseling, the husband was told, "You're now married; you need to consider your wife in this decision."

This man was not only working overtime, but he had recreational activities that were way beyond the time he was spending with his wife. There was a lack of balance that provoked this jealousy, so they had to make some adjustments. Neither person has the right to dictate or demand their own way all the time. Marital adjustments are a matter of listening, caring, and working together with an attitude of love. This will require time spent looking at God's Word and in prayer.

DIG DEEPER

Instead of turning to envy, we need to act according to God's wisdom:

But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.
(James 3:17-18)

List characteristics of wisdom from this Scripture that can improve your actions toward your spouse. How can you apply them to problem areas? Be specific.

Describe what actions result from envy.

But the Jews who were not persuaded, becoming envious, took some of the evil men from the marketplace, and gathering a mob, set all the city in an uproar and attacked the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people. (Acts 17:5)

But Pilate answered them, saying, “Do you want me to release to you the King of the Jews?” For he knew that the chief priests had handed Him over because of envy.

But the chief priests stirred up the crowd, so that he should rather release Barabbas to them. (Mark 15:9–11)

ACTION PLAN 2

Identify where you are envious or provoking envy in your spouse. Discuss it as a couple, ask forgiveness, and come up with a plan for change.

4. Love does not parade itself or brag.

Bragging applies to both husbands and wives. It comes out as belittling and making the other person feel less important or undervalued in the relationship.

For example, a troubled couple came to counseling, and the husband’s complaint was their physical relationship had not been where it should in a long time. He felt low on the scale of importance and priority to his wife. This man was so frustrated and bitter that he verbally thrashed her in front of the counselor. “All

FACT FILE

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

she's got to do is take the three kids to school, big deal." He went on belittling the value and importance of tending to the home and the children. "I work hard, I bring home the money, and all she has to do is get the kids to school. What's the big deal? And I come home at night, and all I hear from her is, 'I'm tired'!"

The counselor asked his wife how that made her feel. He sat there, surprised, while she bowed her head and wept. The counselor said, "Dude, did you hear yourself? How important is it for your wife to stay home to love, to cherish, and to be there for your kids? How important is that to you, and how important is that to God? Very important! What just came out of your mouth was so arrogant and hurtful. Yes, areas in your life need to change, and areas in your wife's life need to change toward you, but what you just did, this arrogant attitude, just hurt your wife deeply."

And wives can do it too. One of the most common ways is regarding raising the children. Dad gives a discipline, and as soon as he leaves Mom says, "Don't listen to him, you know Dad, he'll forget tomorrow." Belittling the father to the children, or undermining his authority, is sinful and a type of indirect arrogance. The implication is that Dad is an idiot and doesn't know what he's talking about. This is a wife who is setting herself above her husband, seeing herself as the wise and fair parent.

Let another man praise you, and not your own mouth,
A stranger, and not your own lips. (Proverbs 27:2)

Self-Examination 2

If bragging is a technique you use with your spouse, confess it to God and commit to change.

DIG DEEPER

Identify what these Scriptures say about exalting yourself. If you are doing this with your spouse, how can you make it right by applying these principles? Be specific.

For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith. (Romans 12:3)

For if anyone thinks himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself. (Galatians 6:3)

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

5. Love is not puffed up or arrogant.

We are not to be dictators, brutally or arrogantly ruling over each other. God wants you to love and encourage your spouse, not try to control them. Your attitudes must reflect that you are acting in each other's best interest in every situation, helping each other to develop a godly marriage. Your spouse should feel like they are one with you, equals in God's sight. Even though the husband is the leader, he should not be ruling over his wife as if in the military. But wives can also play the role of ruling the house by using pride or arrogance.

FACT FILE

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

We must always remember the primary principle of a godly marriage: we are ministers. We must view our position in marriage as a divine calling from the Lord and do all for His glory, not ours. Jesus was with His disciples when two of them asked if they could sit one on His right hand and the other on His left in God's kingdom.

Jesus responded to them in Matthew 20:25–28:

You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.

The words *servant*, *served*, and *serve* are derived from the Greek word *diakonos*, translated as “minister” in some verses of the New Testament. A slave was someone who had no rights of his own but was devoted to the will of another. Jesus was not condemning authority but emphasizing its proper use. Jesus had all the authority in the world, but His attitude was to serve and fulfill the Father's will. Husbands and wives each have their own God-given authority, but how each exercise that privilege is of the utmost importance to God as His ministers to do His will.

Self-Examination 3

Are you a dictator at times when you talk to your spouse or by your actions? __ Yes __ No

Describe what the Lord has revealed to you.

DIG DEEPER

Identify what the Bible says about pride and arrogance, and how this could affect your marriage.

The fear of the Lord is to hate evil;
Pride and arrogance and the evil way
And the perverse mouth I hate. (Proverbs 8:13)

When pride comes, then comes shame;
But with the humble is wisdom. (Proverbs 11:2)

By pride comes nothing but strife,
But with the well-advised is wisdom. (Proverbs 13:10)

But He gives more grace. Therefore He says:
"God resists the proud,
But gives grace to the humble." (James 4:6)

Lesson 4

Glorify God, Not Our Flesh

Sometimes we cross the boundary of love and good will. We know what hurts our spouse and say it anyway, even in front of other people. Whatever it is, God says it is sin, and we need to stop.

6. Love does not behave rudely, is not unbecoming.

This can include purposely embarrassing or demeaning your spouse in front of others, including your children, or using rude jesting and sarcasm toward each other. Many families love joking and do it a lot in their houses. But there is a place where you can cross the line. When this happens, a polite comment from the wounded partner should be enough to bring an apology and stop the behavior.

Jesting comes up often in counseling—things either spouse does for many years and excuses as fun jesting. God says it's okay to joke, but don't be rude. During a counseling session, a wife said to her husband, "You're such a baby, that's why I treat you like a kid." And they wonder why their marriage is in trouble. We need to call it sin and ask God to change our hearts and stop the bad habit.

FACT FILE

Rude—Characterized by roughness; harsh, severe, ugly, indecent, or offensive in manner or action.

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

Husbands and wives, we must learn how to speak blessings into each other's lives. Tell your wife how you appreciate her: "You're a great mom." "I love the way you show affection to the kids." "You are beautiful." "The house looks great." And wives, do the same for your husband: "You're my man." "You're my lover." "The kids look up to you." "You are a good provider." Use words that bless, speak truth, and bring encouragement to one another.

One of the greatest lessons you can learn is to thank God for your spouse when you are praying together. Give praise to God for the good things they do, in their presence. You begin to do that, and you will be blessed. Ephesians 4:29 gives us a guide: "Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers."

There are times to exercise constraint and "let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth." When it does not build up, it brings your spouse down. It qualifies as gossip, which is rude, harsh, unkind, and is the opposite of building up. We must keep in mind, *Are my next words going to build my spouse up, draw my spouse to Christ, and impart the grace of God to their ears?* Now, that's love.

Within our marriages, we all will make mistakes and sin against each other. When we do, we are to ask forgiveness and should receive that forgiveness from our spouses. When the sin that wounded you is forgiven, the retelling of it, or bringing it up again, is not acceptable. The Bible says, "Love covers sin" (Proverbs 10:12), and it is sad that so many spouses are bad-mouthing or gossiping about their spouse's shortcomings. Love seeks to conceal the faults of others, but not ignore them.

DIG DEEPER

Meditate on how the following passage relates to this subject.

He who covers and forgives an offense seeks love,
But he who repeats or gossips about a matter separates intimate friends.
(Proverbs 17:9 AMP)

To cover means “to put a lid on it, conceal it.” Why would we want to do that? Because loving our spouse seeks the best for that individual. To quote a noted Christian scholar, “Someone has said, that, if tempted to relate unsavory things of an absent person, it is well to ask mentally three questions: Is it true? Is it kind? Is it necessary?”⁷ Let’s add one more question: Would it edify the person we are talking about and those who are listening?

This caution never means that we ignore, or overlook, our spouse’s sin toward us or our children. Read, from an analysis of Proverbs 17:9, how one author explains covering a transgression:

To cover a transgression, however, does not mean to make light of sin and allow iniquity to go unrebuked in another. It is, on the contrary, to go to the erring one personally in tenderness and brotherly kindness; to seek to exercise his conscience as to that in his course, which is bringing dishonor upon his Lord. If such a mission is successful, the sin should never again be mentioned. It is covered, and none other need know of it.⁸

What wise words for us to follow. Forgiveness and reconciliation should be done immediately or as soon as possible.

Self-Examination 1

Are there times you are rude or harsh to your spouse? ___ Yes ___ No

What behavior has the Lord revealed that needs changing? Write your confession. If asking your spouse for forgiveness is in order, do it.

7. Love does not seek to have its own way.

We don't realize how selfish we are until we get married. Adapting to sharing a life with someone is essential. Situations arise requiring compromise and change. For example, wives often need to communicate with their husbands for at least forty-five minutes per day. Husbands can tend to ignore this, but it should not be only about what he needs, but what she needs. Recognizing our partner's need is good, but it's not productive if we fail to follow through and adapt by implementing change. Some couples take time to chat after their kids go to bed. But they must listen with interest and a good attitude.

FACT FILE

Seek your own way—A person who pursues what best fits their own interests, without any concern of how their actions or ways affect others. Not willing to receive input, which includes instruction from God's perspective or their spouse.

They could start walking together in the mornings, but that requires compromise. The husband who doesn't have the need to talk might not feel like getting up earlier each day, but they could agree to walk and talk three days a week. They might work up to walking each morning as he learns to meet her need and show her that she comes right after God in importance. This is only one example of putting your own way, needs, or desires aside for the love of another.

Every marriage has two unique personalities. People have different needs, interests, and habits. This is to be expected, but people can be surprisingly stubborn. It is crucial to consider the interests of others. If a husband and wife operate on this principle, there will be harmony in the relationship. For example, the wife might like to keep a clean house, while the husband doesn't make that a priority. Their house would probably be a mess if they operated on the husband's need. The husband can learn how to be clean and tidy in the house, especially when he makes a mess. Expecting his wife to clean up after him is just turning her into the maid.

Some men enjoy riding motorcycles, riding dirt bikes in the desert, and camping. After fifteen years of marriage, his wife might say, "Honey, camping is hard for me, and I really don't enjoy it. Can you and the boys go without me?" If she had said he must quit camping because she's done, that would be wrong. Remember preference. Riding might be very therapeutic for him. The wife could encourage him in this activity.

Husbands, think of projects around the house that you told your wife you would finish—and they're still not done. She asked and you said, "Oh, yeah." But the work has been in limbo for three months or three years. Yet think of all the things you have done for yourself in the meanwhile: trips, golf, tennis, whatever. *She is watching.* You have the motivation to do the things you enjoy, but when she asks for your time, you seldom get around to it. Guys, when your wife asks you to do a project, commit by asking her when she wants it finished and get it done in a reasonable amount of time. This shows her that she is important, loved, and a priority.

Husbands, we have said that your God-given responsibility is to lead in the home. But in the spirit of teamwork, it is important to let your wife express her concerns and involve her in family decisions. Husbands and wives need to work together to come up with plans and solutions, but the final decision lies with the husband. Part of not seeking to have one's own way in marriage is seeking to get each other's input.

Plans are established by counsel;
By wise counsel wage war. (Proverbs 20:18)

Without counsel, plans go awry,
But in the multitude of counselors they are established. (Proverbs 15:22)

We must be careful not to use our own selfish opinions, fears, or preferences to dictate behavior or lifestyle for our spouses. We are all different, and we *complete* each other, not *compete* with each other.

DIG DEEPER

Describe what your attitude and actions should be toward your spouse.

Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests.
(Philippians 2:4)

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

But through love serve one another. (Galatians 5:13)

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

Self-Examination 2

Have you been seeking to have your own way at home? ___ Yes ___ No

If you answered yes, write your commitment to change, asking God for strength to follow through. If asking your spouse for forgiveness in order, do it.

8. Love does not think evil.

God's Word says love "thinks no evil" (1 Corinthians 13:5). The NASB version says it "does not take into account a wrong suffered." For example, holding bad thoughts, bringing up past mistakes, keeping a running list of your spouse's failures, and beating them up with information when the opportunity arises. As believers, we are to be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ, and we are told that we have the mind of Christ within us after we receive Him as Savior and Lord (1 Corinthians 2:16).

FACT FILE

Thinks no evil—Logizomai (Greek). An accounting term, to put things together in one's mind, to count or add up, to occupy oneself with calculations.

How precious also are Your thoughts to me, O God!
How great is the sum of them!
If I should count them, they would be more in number than the sand;
When I awake, I am still with You. (Psalm 139:17–18)

If God knows all the sins we will ever commit and says His thoughts toward us are all good, then what is your excuse for harboring bad thoughts toward your spouse? When you harbor anger, resentment, or bitterness toward your spouse, you will have a bad attitude and likely not want to do anything for that person. It will also influence your communication. This is sin. Are you guilty of pouting, ignoring your spouse, withholding love, or staying angry for days? To forgive or not forgive is a choice. God does not want us to wait until we feel like it. Feelings are good passengers, but they are poor drivers. We must let the Word of God drive us, not our feelings. If you are failing in this way, ask God to change your heart and stop this destructive bad habit.

Wrongs need to be dealt with immediately, and with explanation. What happened last Tuesday should have been covered then, handled with godly wisdom, and discharged. Developing feelings of anger and resentment that remain over time will be destructive to your relationship. You must let truth, not your feelings, dictate how you respond to your spouse.

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

To *become defiled* means that a bitter person, which could be a bitter spouse, will eventually spill the poison of resentment into the lives of others, defiling and hurting them. These practices are

the opposite of love. Many husbands and wives never consider the fact that they are practicing the opposite of love. We must choose not to think evil, but meditate on what is good.

Many are experiencing the poison spewing out of a spouse because of unforgiveness. God's Word says that when you harbor bitterness, it is like poison oozing out that affects everyone around you. Many Christian homes have this poisonous goo that God is talking about. Unforgiveness is a poison one takes hoping to hurt the other person. Truly, unforgiveness is like a cancer. If we allow it to, it will devour us from the inside and infect everyone around us in a negative way.

The Living Bible says this about love:

It is not irritable or touchy. It does not hold grudges and will hardly even notice when others do wrong. (1 Corinthians 13:5 TLB)

That is God's description of love. How much should we forgive? God's Word says in Matthew 18:22, "seventy times seven," or 490 times. This is not a limit, but an example meaning endlessly. Hopefully you've forgiven your spouse this way. In Ephesians 4:32, Paul wrote, "And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you." God's Word teaches that love practices forgiveness. Always be willing to give it and ask for it.

DIG DEEPER

Describe how and why we should forgive others.

And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you. (Ephesians 4:32)

ACTION PLAN

Have you been following Christ's example of forgiving, forgetting, and thinking good thoughts toward your spouse? ___ Yes ___ No

If not, write the areas where you are failing to forgive your spouse. Ask God's forgiveness and pick a time to ask your spouse's forgiveness.

DIG DEEPER

Explain this verse in your own words. How can you apply it toward forgiveness?

Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things. (Philippians 4:8)

9. Love does not rejoice in unrighteousness.

This is a command in 1 Corinthians 13:6. God is saying, “Don’t even think about it.” *That* is the emphasis.

Do you feel pleasure when your spouse gets an earful from your kids? Do you hope your son or your daughter will do something wrong so you can tell your spouse, “See, if you would have done it my way, this would not have happened”? Have you felt yourself secretly pleased when another person fails? That is sinful. The Bible tells us to encourage and edify one another.

FACT FILE

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

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

Therefore comfort each other and edify one another. (1 Thessalonians 5:11)

The Bible gives us a strict warning concerning how we handle sin. Proverbs 14:9 says, “Fools mock at sin, but among the upright there is favor.” *To mock* means “to boast, to scorn, deride, or be inflated.” The word *favor* has the root meaning of delight, pleasure, or acceptance. As husbands and wives, we need to adhere to the latter part of the verse, so when our spouses fall into sin, they find favor with us from a heart of compassion that lovingly encourages them.

When a woman was caught in the act of adultery, the Jews brought her to Jesus and asked, “Teacher, this woman was caught in adultery, in the very act. Now Moses, in the law, commanded us that such should be stoned. But what do You say?” (John 8:4–5). The Jews were testing Jesus. They also were rejoicing that the woman was caught and looking forward to stoning her. (Note: where was the offending man?)

At times your spouse will act out in sin, perhaps lying, getting angry, or yelling. What should be your response? Jesus said this, “He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first” (John 8:7). He started writing on the ground, and it is believed that He was pointing out the accusers’ sins. One by one, they all left because their hearts were convicted (verse 9). Jesus spoke directly to the woman, that He did not condemn her, and this was her chance to go and sin no more (verse 11).

Every husband and wife will witness their spouse failing. When we see it, we need to exercise self-control. Proverbs 24:17 says, “Do not rejoice when your enemy falls, and do not let your heart be glad when he stumbles.” Since we are not to rejoice when our enemy falls, how much more should we not gloat when our spouses fall?

Because of fallen nature, there is a mean streak in each of us that sometimes takes pleasure when someone is suffering because of foolish choices. All we have to do is turn on the TV and watch the latest reality show where people are laughing at, or at least being entertained by, the foolishness of others. “Well, that person deserved what they got.”

When this attitude creeps into our homes, it has devastating effects on our spouses and children because we are misrepresenting God. It totally blurs and corrupts what love is. We see our spouses fail regularly, we fail regularly, and our children challenge us daily. The question is, how are you going to represent God during these times? To put the focus back on ourselves, how do we want God to treat us when we fail to glorify Him by our behavior?

When you read the story of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11–32), you get a glimpse of a father’s heart toward a son who falls into sin, which is a picture of our heavenly Father’s heart. When his son finally made a decision to return home, the Bible says, “And he arose and came to his father. But when he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him” (verse 20). Without any superior morality over his son’s fall, he embraced his son and kissed him. Many spouses still need to develop this type of compassion.

If we ignore God’s Word, or resist the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and fall into sin and error, God does not rejoice. Instead, His heart is broken over our foolishness and rebellion. When you find yourself not practicing love with your spouse, you must confess this to God, ask for forgiveness, then repent, and turn from this sin. God will change your heart as you confess and obey Him. Remember, failures are God’s way of revealing the areas that need to be transformed and for us to learn how to respond to our spouses in a godly way. God’s goal is to have us transformed into His image.

Biblical mercy means we receive God’s pardon, not the penalty for our sin, because of the work of Christ and His grace. But the Bible also tells us that God disciplines His children, meaning you and me. God is involved. He is *not* absent in these difficult situations.

DIG DEEPER

Describe what these Scriptures say about mercy and compassion. How can you apply this to your marriage? Be specific.

Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful. (Luke 6:36)

Blessed are the merciful,
For they shall obtain mercy. (Matthew 5:7)

Through the Lord's mercies we are not consumed,
Because His compassions fail not.
They are new every morning;
Great is Your faithfulness. (Lamentations 3:22-23)

Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies.
(Colossians 3:12)

Let not mercy and truth forsake you;
Bind them around your neck,
Write them on the tablet of your heart. (Proverbs 3:3)

Lesson 5

Focus on Truth, Not Sin

Our sin nature wants to focus on another person's failures. Yielding to this temptation makes us *emotionally sick* and separates our hearts from God.

What Love Is

10. Love rejoices in the truth.

Do you praise your spouse, telling them about the good things they do, or do you mostly point to their weaknesses and failures? Watch out, because you can harbor these negative thoughts, even if you do not express them verbally. Imagine asking your spouse, "On an average week or an average day, how many blessings come out of my mouth toward you versus how many negative things?"

FACT FILE

Rejoicing in the truth—Having great joy, able to rejoice at what is true, based on God's promises.

Positive communication is: "How are you doing?" "You look nice." "How did things go for you today?" Negative is: "What's wrong with you? I asked you to do one thing!" "Why are you late from work? Now dinner is cold! Don't you care about the work I put into this?" "Honey, why didn't you take the trash out?!" This could be any form of pointing out each other's faults in a negative or unloving way.

Without realizing it, days turn into weeks, and weeks turn into months, all the while we are poisoning our spouses, sinning against them, not loving them, because we are consumed with pointing out what they are not doing right and not thinking about praising them for their successes. Husbands and wives need to be actively thinking about good things concerning their mates. We need to beware of developing negative attitudes. It is a choice to cultivate positive thoughts and use them to bless each other. We need to practice appreciation. This is not flattery, but genuine love from a heart of thankfulness.

If this negativity is sending your marriage in the wrong direction, turn it around. During your family or prayer time, take a moment and say, "Let's all say something good about one another." Make it fun. Get the family started on looking for the good things in one another. It is important that we work together as a team. If you have children, Mom and Dad should be the first to share.

We need to study our spouses and children, to learn their strengths, and to praise them for their qualities and good deeds.

Self-Examination 1

Do you struggle in this area? ___ Yes ___ No

If so, identify at least three strengths you have seen in your spouse. Ask God to show you the best time and way to communicate this. It could be through a letter or a conversation out at a special

dinner. Ask God during your devotional time to help you be observant of your spouse and learn how to praise them.

ACTION PLAN 1

Work together as husband and wife to encourage each other in this practice. Discuss some ways you can help each other in those challenging marital moments. Note them here.

DIG DEEPER

Describe what these Scriptures say about rejoicing in the truth, what is good, and how the principles could apply to your marriage.

How precious also are Your thoughts to me, O God!
How great is the sum of them!
If I should count them, they would be more in number than the sand;
When I awake, I am still with You. (Psalm 139:17–18)

Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good.
(Romans 12:9)

See that no one renders evil for evil to anyone, but always pursue what is good both for yourselves and for all. (1 Thessalonians 5:15)

11. Love bears all things.

Another aspect of love in 1 Corinthians 13:7 is that love “bears all things.” *Not bearing* means giving up, telling yourself you can’t take it anymore and feeling as if you are tired of trying. We must daily abide in Christ and have a healthy devotional life to bear with each other and be patient with each other.

When we feel like giving up, we cannot blame our spouses. That is our personal disobedience and our sin. We need to be faithful, committed to God’s plan and purpose in marriage, putting our trust in Jesus rather than our spouses.

Head games, the silent treatment, pouting, reacting in anger, and keeping a bad attitude for days are all sin, and it’s not “bearing” in love. You may feel wronged, and with reason, but acting out these behaviors is not the solution.

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

The word *bear* means “to take up in order to carry, to put upon oneself; something to be carried.” Staying obedient to God’s will when your spouse is not doing their part can feel like carrying a heavy weight, but it is an attribute of love. God says we need to “bear” with problems in marriage, and there are seasons when one spouse may be called upon to be the one seemingly bearing more than the other.

If you entered into the relationship not knowing God’s purpose for marriage, having the wrong expectations, or used methods contrary to God’s Word to try changing your spouse, you might find yourself frustrated, depressed, and wanting to give up. Have you ever noticed that men and women have certain expectations when entering into marriage? We expect our spouses to talk, act, and perform the way we want them to, so they are not such an inconvenience.

Marriage takes time, work, and sacrifice, and it is a God-given task. Have you truly accepted this yet? If you are not careful, resentment can creep into your marriage. Bearing all things in love means accepting your ministry as a spouse—the good, the bad, and the challenging—and behaving with godly love. This includes seeing your spouse’s failures and faults as opportunities for God to transform you, not to criticize or deliver harsh, self-righteous lectures.

FACT FILE

Bears [all things]—*Stego* (Greek). To hide, to conceal. Love hides the faults of others or covers them up.⁹ It keeps out resentment as the ship keeps out the water, or the roof the rain.¹⁰

Self-Examination 2

Identify what the Lord has been revealing in you through your spouse that is causing you to want to give up. (Tip: What problems are you blaming on your spouse? What is your attitude?)

DIG DEEPER

Identify the principles in these Scriptures that could help you with your marriage.

We who are strong have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves. (Romans 15:1 ESV)

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

Self-Examination 3

Do you have resentment because of the personality God gave your spouse? __ Yes __ No

If so, describe the issues and make a plan for responding to them in love.

12. Love believes and hopes.

The biblical principle here is that love has a way of believing the best in people even when your feelings tell you otherwise. *Believe* is a verb, which calls for action no matter how we feel. The last principle we learned was to bear all things, or be willing to cover our spouse's mistakes with love. Now we must believe and hope the best for them and maintain a hopeful attitude. We need a willingness to always pursue a trusting relationship, even when there has been dishonesty or a reason not to trust.

FACT FILE

Believing—Pisteuo (Greek). Having faith in, or to be firmly persuaded in something; indicates that there is an attitude of expectant hope.

Do you always ask for forgiveness from your spouse or child when you misrepresent God in your behavior toward them? Jesus said, "He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him" (John 14:21). Forgiveness is the healing salve of the Holy Spirit that brings restoration so one can start over again and believe.

When people come in for marriage counseling, many are trying to do God's will but are failing due to ignorance. They have not been taught, or found on their own, the guidelines for marital success, and they feel hopeless, ready to give up. Often the heavy weight overwhelming them is their own responses to their spouse's behavior. By not "believing or hoping all things" as it says in 1 Corinthians 13, you are doubting God.

Do you doubt God right now? Put your trust in Him. Deception by a spouse in areas such as finances, secret activities, even infidelity, can be devastating, but God wants us to have hope and work toward trust in the relationship. Some past mistakes are held over a spouse like a guillotine. This is not behaving according to God's will. A person with a suspicious attitude is not "hoping all things." That is sin.

A relationship without trust is not a relationship at all. God's plan is for us to become one emotionally. You cannot forgive, even if you are praying for it, if you are clinging to bitterness, refusing to believe what God can do for you and your spouse in and through your marriage.

And if a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand. (Mark 3:25)

DIG DEEPER

Identify the principles from these Scriptures to help your marriage be hopeful and full of believing faith. Relate them to specific issues.

But Jesus looked at them and said to them, "With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible." (Matthew 19:26)

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

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

ACTION PLAN 2

Are there ways in which you have given up believing and hoping in your marriage? ___ Yes ___ No

If so, describe the issues. Ask the Lord to heal your unbelief and help you create a plan to reassure your spouse that God will work these things out.

If you are struggling in this area of trust and need further help to learn to trust God and trust your spouse, or if you need to find forgiveness in your marriage, complete *Appendix P: Trust and Forgiveness*. It will help you learn to trust God first in all circumstances, even trials and tribulations with your spouse, and then understand the importance of forgiveness in your marriage. Learn the steps to reconciliation for those who need to forgive and those who need to be forgiven.

13. Love endures all things.

This verb indicates that love abides, stays strong, and holds its ground. The goal is to last, to tolerate, to suffer patiently. Marriage is hard work. Raising children is hard work. What is your attitude right now toward your spouse? Is it one that manifests your willingness to make it work and to work at it, or are you are just suffering through, going through the motions?

FACT FILE

Endure [all things]—*Hupomeno* (Greek). To abide under, to bear up under, suffer (a load of miseries).¹¹ Patient acquiescence, holding its ground when it can no longer believe nor hope.¹²

As we get older, our bodies change and illness may come. You may be called to care for your spouse, or you may not be able to do the things you used to do or want to do. It might be that your sexual relationship is not what it used to be. Are you willing

to accept this as part of God's plan and endure through it with a joyful heart, seeking God and His wisdom along the way? Husbands, are you going to hold your ground when your wife does not look like the spring chicken she was when you married her, and vice versa for the wife?

It may be that you both are going through a tremendous trial and the Enemy wants to come in and tell you, "You can't take this anymore." Love holds its ground when it seems like you can no longer endure. We must endure to the glory of God. Love places belief and trust in Almighty God, who has a desire to bless both you and your spouse—and bless your marriage. God's faithfulness and strength gives us the ability to trust.

DIG DEEPER

Identify how these Scriptures can help you and your spouse endure through tough times. Give an example for each.

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

In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials. (1 Peter 1:6)

Love Never Fails

Finally, 1 Corinthians 13:8 says, "Love never fails." God loves us first, when we realize and receive that, then we can love both Him and others. This takes us back to the idea of our foundation, our intimacy with God. If we put Him first, look to Him every day for guidance, and desire to do His will, God will give us the grace and power we need to succeed.

Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you. (Ephesians 4:29–32)

The Bible has much to say about loving communication. If Jesus ever gave us a command that God would not enable us to fulfill, He would be a liar. And if we make our own inability a barrier to obedience, we are telling God there is something He has not considered. Every aspect of self-

reliance must be surrendered, replaced by the power of God. Believing ourselves weak and dependent is necessary for the Spirit of God to manifest His power in us. God knows we are not capable in our flesh and our own strength to love each other properly. He is not angry at us when we fail, but He wants us to come to the place where we commit, come to Him daily, moment by moment, for His grace to succeed.

We need to remind ourselves constantly in prayer, “God, I need Your strength and grace every day to succeed.” We cannot rely on yesterday’s grace. Let’s be at God’s feet every day saying, “God, I’m begging for Your grace and mercy to love my spouse and to love my children.” Yesterday will not provide the grace needed today. Have you learned that? When you do, and you commit yourself to daily abiding in Christ, you will experience the fruit of God’s Spirit coming naturally out of your heart.

Remember that the orange tree never works to produce its fruit. When you learn to ask God, trust Him to help you be kind and loving to your spouse. He will do it. Pray daily, “God, give me the strength, the grace to love my spouse, to quit doing the things I’m doing wrong. And give me the grace, the humility, when I fail my spouse, to go and ask forgiveness quickly.” It will not be by you laboring to change your heart but by filling yourself with God’s power to love. He promises to do it. And when you do this, you will begin to change, but not until.

God wants to bless you and me. He wants to be glorified in each of us. But we must choose to be obedient to what His Word tells us to do. The by-product of our daily abiding relationship is the power to obey.

Take a moment and pray this prayer.

Father, I thank You for these wonderful truths. Thank You for not expecting us to do all this in our own strength, in our own power, but You have given us the power of Your Holy Spirit that enables us to do all things according to Your will. And, Father, I pray that if we have been doubting You, doubting the power that You can give me and my spouse, I pray, that You would bring conviction and change our hearts. Give us the hope to put our faith and trust in You, to do a great work in each of our lives, in our marriage, and we pray that where any sinful attitudes or actions are being practiced that You would give us each humble hearts, willing to ask for forgiveness, willing to forgive. Lord, we want You to be glorified. We want our home to be a place where people can see You in and through our lives. We thank You, we praise You, and we ask these things in Jesus’s name. Amen.

Self-Examination 4

First, complete *Appendix E: Effective Listening Self-Evaluation* to see how well you listen. It is designed to help you identify the source of ungodly thoughts, feelings, or behaviors that have caused unloving communication.

Second, complete *Appendix F: Improving Your Loving Communication*. It is designed to help you identify the areas you need to change and to walk you through the reconciliation process with your spouse.

Do not let the Enemy deceive you into acting inappropriately in this area. This self-examination should be completed each time there is unloving communication between a husband and wife until the understanding is complete and the practice of forgiveness and reconciliation becomes a regular part of the relationship.

For a deeper understanding of forgiveness and reconciliation, review *Appendix P: Trust and Forgiveness*.

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 E

Effective Listening Self-Evaluation

Complete this self-evaluation to help you become more aware of your listening habits. Answer each question thoughtfully and honestly, then discuss as a couple.

This homework should be completed each time there is unloving communication between a husband and wife until the understanding is complete and the practice of forgiveness and reconciliation becomes a regular part of the relationship.

Communication Habits Revealed

#	Do You Do the Following?	Most of the Time	Frequently	Occasionally	Almost Never
1	Tune out your spouse when you don't agree with him/her or don't want to hear?				
2	Concentrate on what is being said even if you are not really interested?				
3	Assume you know what your spouse is going to say and stop listening?				
4	Repeat in your own words what your spouse has just said?				
5	Listen to your spouse's viewpoint, even if it differs from yours?				
6	Remain open to learning something from your spouse, even if it seems insignificant?				
7	Find out what words mean when they are used in ways not familiar to you?				
8	Form a rebuttal in your head while your spouse is still talking?				
9	Give the appearance of listening when you are not?				

Communication Habits Revealed (continued)

#	Do You Do the Following?	Most of the Time	Frequently	Occasionally	Almost Never
10	Daydream when your spouse is talking?				
11	Listen for main ideas, not just facts?				
12	Recognize that words don't always mean the same thing to different people?				
13	Listen to only what you want to hear, blotting out your spouse's whole message?				
14	Look at your spouse when he/she is speaking?				
15	Concentrate on your spouse's meaning rather than how he/she looks?				
16	Know which words and phrases you tend to respond to defensively or resentfully?				
17	Think about what you want to accomplish with your communication?				
18	Plan the best time to say what you want to say?				
19	Think about how your spouse might react to what you say?				
20	Consider the best way to communicate (written, spoken, and the timing)?				
21	Always care about your spouse's emotional condition when speaking to him/her (if he/she is stressed, sad, worried, hostile, disinterested, rushed, angry, etc.)?				
22	Adjust your communication to your spouse's personality?				
23	Assume your spouse knows and understands what you are communicating or have communicated to him/her?				
24	Allow your spouse to respectfully vent negative feelings toward you without becoming defensive?				
25	Regularly make efforts to increase your listening efficiency?				

Communication Habits Revealed (continued)

#	Do You Do the Following?	Most of the Time	Frequently	Occasionally	Almost Never
26	Take notes when necessary to help you remember?				
27	Listen closely without being distracted by surroundings and/or children?				
28	Listen to your spouse without judging or criticizing?				
29	Restate instructions and messages to be sure you understand correctly?				
30	Listen to your spouse with preconceived assumptions or attitudes?				
31	Take responsibility for your part in the unloving communication by asking the Lord and your spouse to forgive you?				
32	Discuss with your children any difficulties you are having with your spouse?				

After answering the thirty-two questions, complete the scoring index on the next page.

Effective Listening Self-Evaluation Scoring Index

Circle or highlight the number that represents the category you checked on each item of the *Effective Listening Self-Evaluation*.

#	Most of the Time	Frequently	Occasionally	Almost Never
1	1	2	3	4
2	4	3	2	1
3	1	2	3	4
4	4	3	2	1
5	4	3	2	1
6	4	3	2	1
7	4	3	2	1
8	1	2	3	4
9	1	2	3	4
10	1	2	3	4
11	4	3	2	1
12	4	3	2	1
13	1	2	3	4
14	4	3	2	1
15	4	3	2	1
16	4	3	2	1
17	4	3	2	1
18	4	3	2	1
19	4	3	2	1
20	4	3	2	1
21	4	3	2	1
22	4	3	2	1
23	1	2	3	4
24	4	3	2	1
25	4	3	2	1
26	4	3	2	1
27	4	3	2	1
28	4	3	2	1
29	4	3	2	1
30	1	2	3	4
31	4	3	2	1
32	1	2	3	4
Subtotal				

Calculate your subtotals at the bottom, and then add them together for your grand total. Determine your listening level on the next page.

GRAND TOTAL _____

Listening Level

Write your score on the appropriate line below to determine your listening level.

110–120: Excellent Listener _____

99–109: Above Average Listener _____

88–98: Average Listener _____

77–87: Fair Listener _____

<77: Poor to Very Poor Listener _____

After determining your listening level, you may need to identify areas to change. Complete the companion worksheet next in *Appendix F: Improving Your Loving Communication*, which should be used with this self-evaluation when you see unloving communication being exhibited.

Remember: A true disciple of Christ is not simply trying to acquire intellectual knowledge. A true disciple invests himself or herself to learn and to live according to the principles God teaches in His Word. Your investment to learning and living according to the principles God reveals to you through this material will transform your life as God desires.

Appendix F

Improving Your Loving Communication

Complete individually, then review and discuss as a couple.

After completing *Appendix E: Effective Listening Self-Evaluation* and totaling your score, list by priority the areas you need to change.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____

Review “What Love Is Not” and “What Love Is” from lessons 2–5, numbered 1–13. List by priority any unbiblical communication habits you have been practicing in your home. Pray for God’s grace and strength to change these.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____

Reconciliation

If you believe you have not been demonstrating loving communication to your spouse (or another person), follow the steps below to reconciliation.

1. Confess this to the Lord and ask Him to forgive you for not communicating love to them.

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

2. Ask God to fill your heart with renewed love for your spouse.

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

3. Go to your spouse and make a confession.

For example, "I know I have not been showing you my love by listening to you. I have been impatient, thinking about other things instead of really listening to what you have to say. Please forgive me. I love you, and I am so glad to be your husband/wife."

4. Pray with your spouse.

Commitment

Write a prayer of commitment to seek the Lord for His power to change these areas and to become the spouse God desires. Then, pray with your spouse and together ask God for His strength to break the ungodly and sinful habits that have been practiced for so long.

Appendix G

Breaking the Cycle

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

Step 1

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

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

Reflection

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

Step 2

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Respond to the question.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Step 3

Pray and ask for God's forgiveness.

Step 4

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

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

Do you agree? ___ Yes ___ No

Are you finished learning? ___ Yes ___ No

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

Appendix P

Trust and Forgiveness

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

Trusting God with Our Past and Trials

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

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

FACT FILE

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

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

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

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

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

What Are You Trying to Teach Me?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Our Trials and Tribulations

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Cost of Unforgiveness

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Are any of these common in your life?

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

FACT FILE

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

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

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

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

Why Forgive?

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

God commands it.

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

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

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

In forgiving, we bear the image of Jesus.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Forgiveness loosens the stranglehold of guilt in the offender.

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

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

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

Reconciliation

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

FACT FILE

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

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

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

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

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

How do we put away bitterness?

How do we reconcile with someone whom we have offended?

How do we repair the hurt we have caused others?

How do we forgive someone who has offended us?

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

If You Need to Be Forgiven

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

If You Need to Forgive

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

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

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

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

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

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

Second, communicate your forgiveness to the person or persons.

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

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

Desiring Reconciliation

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Examining Ourselves

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

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

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

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

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

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

FACT FILE

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

A Debt Owed

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

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

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

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

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

Communication Reminders

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

1. You are doing this out of obedience to your heavenly Father, who loves and cares for you.
2. He wants you to be free from the bondage and oppression you have been experiencing as a result of unforgiveness.
3. You do not need to rehearse every detail of their offense against you.
4. Many times, especially when forgiving a spouse, they may be unaware of what they have done to hurt you.
5. Do not compel others to admit their offenses.
6. God has called you to obey, not to be a prosecuting attorney, jury, judge, or to try and make them confess that what they did was wrong.
7. Keep it short.

8. In many cases, due to the high level of emotion, we can find ourselves saying things we didn't intend to say and undermine the purpose of the meeting, conversation, or letter.
9. Finally (if applicable), ask forgiveness for harboring bitterness toward them.
10. Remember that what they may have done was wrong and offensive, but bitterness and unforgiveness are equally wrong.

God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my gospel.
(Romans 2:16)

Therefore you are inexcusable, O man, whoever you are who judge, for in whatever you judge another you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things. (Romans 2:1)

The degree to which I am able and willing to forgive others is a clear indication of the extent to which I have personally experienced God my Father's forgiveness for me. —Phillip Keller

Maintaining Your Commitment to Forgive

You may encounter a battle between the Spirit and the flesh after you have asked for forgiveness or have forgiven another person.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another. (Galatians 5:22–26)

The forgiveness experience will change you and your relationships over time. God has had a major victory in your life, bringing you to this place of surrender and obedience. But this is only the beginning. Now you must press in and work through the needed changes. This will require that you seek God daily for His strength to continue on your path of mercy and compassion.

For example, you might have forgiven a parent for being harsh and unloving and asked them to forgive you for harboring bitterness. Yet they may continue to be harsh and unloving. Your flesh may want to react the way you formerly reacted. God will be faithful to produce His fruit in your life as you surrender to Him moment by moment.

For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. (Ephesians 6:12)

You must keep in mind that your obedience in forgiving was not so your spouse (or the other person) would change. If they surrender their will to the Lord, they will experience God's grace, healing, and the ability to change. Only God can change our hearts and renew our minds, but it will only happen as we surrender to Him.

We are involved in a spiritual battle every day. The Enemy, Satan, does not want you to obey God or have victory over sin and hurts. He will attack your mind with memories, evil thoughts, lies, temptations, and condemnation. You must exercise mental self-control and remember what and whom you are battling!

“Be angry, and do not sin”: do not let the sun go down on your wrath, nor give place to the devil. (Ephesians 4:26–27)

This is the reality in which we live. Satan hates to lose ground in your life. He wants to rob you of God’s peace and joy.

Satan’s Destruction

Stop giving the devil opportunities to work his destruction in your life. Test each thought that enters your mind by God’s Word to see if it is from Him, from your flesh, or from the Enemy.

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ, and being ready to punish all disobedience when your obedience is fulfilled. (2 Corinthians 10:3–6)

Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things. (Philippians 4:8)

Pray in every temptation, asking for God’s power to do His will.

Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. (Romans 12:21)

Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. (Romans 15:13)

Resist and rebuke the devil in the name of Jesus. *Fight!*

Yet Michael the archangel, in contending with the devil . . . dared not bring against him a reviling accusation, but said, “The Lord rebuke you!” (Jude 1:9)

Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God . . . casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you. . . . Your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith. (1 Peter 5:6–9)

I have forgiven that one for your sakes in the presence of Christ, lest Satan take advantage of us; for we are not ignorant of his devices. (2 Corinthians 2:10–11)

God wants you to be victorious. Be aware of the devil's devices. Unforgiveness is one of his most powerful tactics to keep us in bondage. Jesus showed the importance of using Scripture to combat Satan's deceptions (Matthew 4:4, 7, 10).

Develop an action plan by using any of the verses above, or the many verses in this study, to combat unbiblical thoughts and to set your mind on God's perspective. Write a verse on an index card and memorize it by carrying the card with you and reviewing it in the morning and night. Continue to add to your victory kit by memorizing verses. As you pray over and memorize Scripture, you are hiding God's Word in your heart (Psalm 119:11). This will be your victory.

Quote Scripture to replace evil thoughts, reinforce God's truth, and answer the Enemy as Jesus did. When Satan brought lies to Jesus, He said, "It is written" (Matthew 4:4, 7), and He quoted Scripture. We must do the same. Truth will *always* prevail.

Establishing Boundaries

You may need to establish boundaries. Asking for forgiveness or forgiving another does not give that person the right to treat you with disrespect or be harsh.

If your mother was harsh or manipulative toward you when you were growing up and she continued after you moved out, you need to set boundaries in your relationship (after forgiving her). Kindly explain that you want a relationship with her but need to establish boundaries to not be hurt by her. Perhaps you could add, "Mom, I need you to speak to me in a loving way, and I promise to do the same toward you. If either of us say something unkind, we need to express that the other person hurt us. Or if we wish to not talk about a certain subject, we need to honor that. If those boundaries are not respected, then I will end the discussion. Mom, the only way we can truly know if we desire to have a relationship is by the way we love and respect each other."

Unable to Reconcile

Sometimes it is not possible to reconcile. If the person you need to forgive is deceased or unwilling to reconcile, you can still forgive them.

Bitterness in the human heart lives on long after the object of that bitterness has died. It is important to view forgiveness as a powerful antidote to heal the human soul of unhealthy human conditions. If you choose to trust God and receive this "antidote," God will bring healing and even fill those voids in your soul. The death of the offender does not nullify God's Word.

True, biblical forgiveness requires us to take action. We must do more than agree in our minds or hearts that we should forgive. The Bible does not command us to merely *feel* forgiveness. We must exercise our will and follow through with our actions.

You must begin with confession to the Lord. It is helpful if you speak your confession out loud and verbalize your forgiveness of the deceased person in the presence of a trusted friend, spouse, pastor, or counselor.

FACT FILE

Confess—To acknowledge or disclose one's misdeed, fault, or sin.

Your Responsibility

You are only responsible for *your part* of reconciliation. Regardless of the position your spouse takes (or the other person), you must obey God by asking for forgiveness and giving forgiveness. If they refuse to grant you forgiveness, or they do not acknowledge their wrong toward you, God will still bless you for your obedience and pour out His peace, grace, and mercy upon your life. You will still experience His freedom from bondage.

You cannot place any expectations or requirements on the other person. Surrender all to the Lord and trust Him to work in your circumstances. We must not lean on our own understanding but obey and surrender to God and His will. He has given us spiritual laws to govern, protect, and set us free. His Word gives us understanding and instruction about how to follow these laws. Our flesh, pride, and fear will keep us from trusting and obeying God in these situations, but through the power of the Holy Spirit, we can overcome.

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

Use the following prayer to guide you:

Lord Jesus, I pray for the strength to trust You in these circumstances. Help me to remember that I am doing this for You. I know You alone can heal me and my spouse for the wrong we have done to each other. I pray for reconciliation with my spouse, but I know that I can only do my part. I pray for my spouse to surrender to You that You might be glorified. I trust You entirely with the results. In Jesus's name I pray. Amen.

Conclusion

It can be extremely difficult to forgive, but life is harder when we do not forgive because we are harboring sin and missing out on what Jesus did for us on the cross. Our experience of God's forgiveness is directly related to our ability to forgive others. A readiness to forgive others is one indication that you have truly repented of your own sin, surrendered your life, and received God's forgiveness. A surrendered heart toward God cannot be a hard heart toward others.

Pride and fear keep us from forgiveness and reconciliation. Refusing to give in or be broken, insisting on your rights, and defending yourself are all indications that selfish pride is ruling your life, rather than the Lord. When fear of *what if* is consuming and controlling you, pray for the faith to trust and obey God. Enemies are very expensive to keep. The parable in Matthew 18:21–35 warns that an unforgiving spirit will put you in an emotional prison.

The first and often the only person to be healed by forgiveness is the person who does the forgiving. . . . When we genuinely forgive, we set a prisoner free and then discover that the prisoner we set free was us. —Lewis Smedes

Appendix R

Glossary

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

compromise: To settle differences by mutual consensuses.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

purpose: An intended or desired result or goal.

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

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

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

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

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

respond: React positively or favorably.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Endnotes

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About the Author

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

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

Be Encouraged

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

God's Promise to You

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

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

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

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

About Family Discipleship Ministries

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

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

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