

JOSEF KAUZLARICH

MARRIAGE IS
WORTH THE FIGHT





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www.marriageisworththefight.com

This work is dedicated to my wife, Nikki.

There are many virtuous and capable
women in the world, but you
surpass them all! Proverbs 31: 29

BOOK STRUCTURE

This book is divided into four key sections: *The Value of Marriage*, *Marriage Foundations*, *Marriage Principles*, and *Marriage Intimacy*. While you will gain the most by reading the entire book, each section stands on its own—so feel free to start where you are most drawn. See the introduction for more detail.

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Section 1

THE VALUE
OF MARRIAGE

Introduction

You have heard the saying, “Behind every great man is a great woman.” While there is truth in this, it only tells part of the story. Great men often have remarkable women beside them, and the reverse is also true. Great women often have exceptional men at their side. However, I believe this sentiment can be better expressed to reflect the power of partnership between man and woman. I would rather say, “Where godly marriage thrives, there greatness will be also.”

Thriving marriages, as the bedrock of society, can transform our culture, create stability, and defend against the enemy’s schemes. When men and women unite with a shared commitment to honor God and reflect His glory through their marriage, they become a potent force for the Kingdom of God. Their union influences each other, their children, social circles, the church, and the workplace. But how does this work? It all begins with the foundational purpose of marriage.

God designed marriage as a covenantal union between male and female image-bearers to manifest His rule on earth, reflect His glory, and draw others into relationship with Him. Wow! That is a mouthful, and it is more than I can explain well here; however, I will present it concisely and encourage you to read on for now.

When the individual strengths of man and woman unite to advance God’s Kingdom, their partnership becomes a powerful, transformational force. Why is this true? Because God created men and women to reflect His nature uniquely, each bringing complementary qualities to represent Him on earth. The gender construct of male and female is the only point of diversity mentioned in God’s description of making humans in His image, which makes it noteworthy and something we should pay close attention to. God’s design for marriage combines the unique strengths of men and women into a partnership that reflects His purpose and grows the Kingdom of God.

However, man’s fall has left us with tragic consequences to the very fabric of God’s design. Instead of seeking harmony, men and women often strive to dominate one

another through power, manipulation, jealousy, and other evils that undermine a perfect union. Both seek to control rather than submit to the only One who deserves to reign—the great I Am.

Throughout history, men have often taken control in the power struggle, dominating women and forcing them to submit to their will. Entire movements in our society today are trying to convince men that marriage is not worth the effort. If these movements take hold, we cannot begin to fathom the destruction they will bring to our culture. For a healthy society, we need good institutions, which require good communities, which need good families, which depend on good marriages, which require good men. Remove men from marriage; one half of its foundation crumbles and everything else we hold dear will be lost.

I have chosen to focus this work on men to counteract this cultural messaging teaching them marriage is no longer worth their effort. When properly harnessed, our natural masculine traits—strength, courage, determination, and a desire for greatness and legacy—lead us to protect, provide, lead, and sacrifice ourselves for our wives and families. Playing this role leads to flourishing marriages and families. When men honor God and give their lives to Him, they become a sturdy wall of defense against the powers of darkness that look to destroy everything beautiful and sacred. In a time and culture that constantly attacks and undermines men, we must encourage them to stand firm, realize their God-given potential, and value what He says about them. We desperately need this, and I pray this work contributes to that goal.

This call to leadership is a significant responsibility; it is a serious charge for which husbands will ultimately be accountable before God. One day, I will stand before the awesome, incomprehensible, and eternal God, who will judge me on how well I managed what He entrusted to my care. I do not want to stand in His presence, ashamed for wasting the opportunities He gave me. Instead, I aspire to achieve greatness in the Kingdom of God with my life, seeking the eternal reward of my heavenly Father's approval.

But what leads to this reward? How does God define greatness? Jesus provided us with the answer: greatness is not found in power, wealth, influence, fame, beauty,

or wisdom—although these are not inherently evil. God measures our achievements by a different standard. Jesus taught that greatness is rooted in serving others.

Service is not a concept we naturally embrace. Our instinct is to avoid the “lowly” positions and tasks that we believe diminish our egos. Yet, this is precisely where Jesus indicated that greatness lies, and He demonstrated this truth repeatedly. One of His final acts was to wash His disciples’ feet and pray for them throughout the night, even knowing they would betray Him. Jesus is our ultimate example. At every turn, He thought of and served others. If we want to be great, we must follow His example. Our measures of success must change. The prize will not go to the wealthiest or most influential but to those who are faithful in serving those around them.

If greatness is defined by how well we serve others, who exactly are these “others” we should serve? Are we rewarded more for serving significant numbers of people? Does having larger numbers equate to more affirmation from God? I do not believe that is the case. While God uniquely graces some individuals to serve the multitudes, this is not the norm and does not guarantee a greater reward.

Some of the most honored individuals in heaven may be those whose names are unknown outside their close circles. God measures our impact differently than we tend to. He considers how we allow the Spirit to work through us in the lives of those closest to us, considering our starting point and natural limitations.

God designs each of us uniquely and equips us for a specific purpose. This means that most Christ-followers are called to serve those close to them primarily, and this should be their focus. This is not a limitation on what God can accomplish through someone but rather a reminder that human measures of success, like numbers, do not necessarily align with God’s standards. There is no indication in Scripture that quantity will determine our reward in heaven. The parable of the talents illustrates that the grace given by God varies among servants, but the reward for faithful use of that grace is the affirmation of the master.

My soul longs to hear, “Well done, good and faithful servant.” I want to stand before my Father, knowing I am the pride and joy of His heart because of what He did through me. All other desires in life pale compared to the pleasure of the Father’s

affirmation. The beauty of this, as with most things created by God, is that as we seek and enthrone Him in our lives, making Him our ultimate prize, He turns it back to bless us. When blessing is our goal, we never find it. But when God is our goal, blessings abound.

This book is about helping you build a stronger, more joyful marriage—but it's also about something even deeper: running hard after God and making Him your ultimate prize. God truly cares about your happiness and fulfillment. He designed marriage to be a source of both. At the same time, He invites you into a life of purpose—one that leaves a lasting, eternal legacy. What you'll see in these pages is how your marriage, your personal walk with God, and your pursuit of a meaningful life are all deeply connected. Many people enter marriage hoping to find happiness, yet come away disillusioned. But when God becomes the center—when He is seen as the true source of joy and fulfillment—marriage begins to thrive, and so does everything else.

I must admit, I have no special qualifications to make me an authority on the topic of men in marriage. Aside from being a husband for the past 18 years, I do not claim any other experience. All I have is a passion to see men of God rise and take their proper place as sons and heirs to the promises of God. I want to see them love and lead their wives and families into a deeper understanding of God and who they are in Him and spread that message to everyone they know. This is how we reclaim our culture: one marriage at a time. If we get this right, we will release the power of God's unified nature into the world through His perfect design of covenantal marriage.

This journey may not be easy for you, but I can make this promise: if you give this book's principles an honest chance, you give your marriage the best opportunity to heal and grow into a powerful force for God's Kingdom. I'll be honest telling you up front that parts of this book will be an intellectual hike. But if you stick it out, you can restore, strengthen, and elevate your marriage to a place of true greatness through the Holy Spirit's power. God's design is faithful, and if you are ready to embrace His vision, your marriage can become a powerful, godly force in the world.

STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

I have organized this work into four primary sections: *The Value of Marriage*,

Marriage Foundations, Marriage Principles, and Marriage Intimacy. I believe your most transformational experience will take place by reading the whole book; however, it is designed so you can start in one section or chapter over another. Feel free to jump around!

THE VALUE OF MARRIAGE (INTRODUCTION, CHAPTER 1)

This chapter focuses on the critical importance of marriage in your personal life. Throughout the book, I emphasize the concepts of selflessness, sacrifice, and service. However, in this section, I specifically highlight how essential your wife (or future wife) can be to your overall effectiveness, fulfillment, and happiness. If you find yourself questioning whether marriage is worth your full commitment, it is important to understand the value that scripture places on your wife.

MARRIAGE FOUNDATIONS (CHAPTERS 2–6)

If you love to study the underpinnings of everything, then this section is for you. While it can be an endearing moment to hear the longest-married couple at a wedding share a single pearl of wisdom, there is not one key to a successful marriage. Understanding this divine institution, starting at its roots, is essential. In this section, I explore the foundational truths of marriage including its purpose, design, and connection to a life of greatness. I also dedicate a chapter to the importance of drawing near to God and surrendering to Him through spiritual disciplines, enabling you to be filled with His love and pass it on to your spouse.

MARRIAGE PRINCIPLES (CHAPTERS 7–14)

Principles are valuable because they offer broad, consistent guidance across varying situations. Life is often too complex—and situations too nuanced—for us to evaluate right and wrong in real-time. Instead, we benefit from anchoring ourselves in guiding behaviors and familiar frameworks that can be applied to the situation. In this section of chapters, I introduce a memorable framework for marriage, rooted in Micah 6:8, and provide principles that can shape your thinking, words, and actions. This section includes practical, actionable steps you can implement to strengthen your relationship.

MARRIAGE INTIMACY (CHAPTERS 15–17)

Many challenges in marriage can be resolved through intentional efforts to draw

near to one's spouse. These chapters focus on cultivating intimacy, establishing rhythms that foster connection, and understanding the importance of sexual intimacy in a healthy marriage.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

If you appreciate the content of this book and want to help spread the message, kindly consider assisting in its distribution to a wider audience. Key ways you can support this work include:

- Providing an honest and thoughtful review on the marketplace where the book was purchased.
- Sharing the book with friends and family through conversation and social media platforms.
- Organizing a church connect group focused on discussing this book.
- Subscribing to my mailing list at www.marriageisworththefight.com to stay aware of new developments and content.

May God bless you as we start this journey together!

Chapter One

Marriage is Worth the Fight

LIVE HAPPILY WITH THE WOMAN YOU LOVE THROUGH ALL THE MEANINGLESS DAYS OF LIFE THAT GOD HAS GIVEN YOU UNDER THE SUN. THE WIFE GOD GIVES YOU IS YOUR REWARD FOR ALL YOUR EARTHLY TOIL. ECCLESIASTES 9:9 NLT

There is a social trend emerging among male opinion on marriage. Many men believe that the value proposition for marriage has dramatically diminished in modern Western society. Proponents of this perception often claim that women are unfit for marriage because feminism has poisoned their minds against men. Moreover, they argue that since family law is skewed in favor of wives, especially if they are mothers, modern women are looking to find a man they can marry, divorce, and rob of their resources and children¹.

Leaders of this movement are not entirely without justification. Their views often stem from a visceral reaction to the attack on traditional masculinity that has been waged for decades. Given the option of embracing a feminized version of manhood or doubling down on its worst attributes, many men appear to prefer the latter. Some advocates testify to losing more than their “fair share” in divorce proceedings, though the definition of “fair” remains subjective in these cases. Statistically, women are the primary initiators of divorce, and in the vast majority of divorce cases, women receive custody of their children^{2,3}.

Proponents of this mindset often idealize women from the past who prioritized respecting their husbands, though their definition of “respect,” appears to be that

they do as they are told. They desire a wife who cooks, cleans, raises children, and fulfills their husband's needs without question—or they prefer no wife at all. Increasingly, some men believe they do not need women for a fulfilling life and would like to remain single. Others advocate for relationships with multiple women, often younger, provided that the man can financially support them.

The underlying theme is that marriage is no longer worth the effort. For many men, the ends do not justify the means. The more concerning aspect of this trend is its growing popularity and the cultural shift it signifies.

Marriage is experiencing a significant decline, in the United States. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, marriage rates have steadily decreased over the past decade, with 16.3 new marriages per 1,000 women aged 15 and over in 2019, down from 17.6 in 2009⁴.

Surveys further confirm that men's interest in marriage is waning when compared to women's. A 2013 Pew Research Center study revealed that among never-married adults aged 30 to 50, 27% of men reported not wanting to marry, compared to only 8% of women⁵. Additionally, a 2023 survey conducted by the Thriving Center of Psychology found that two in five young adults view marriage as an outdated tradition, with 85% stating that marriage is unnecessary for a fulfilling relationship⁶.

As a married Christian who has experienced the joys of a fruitful marriage, I find this trend deeply disturbing. Marriage is not just a cultural institution but one designed and established by God Himself. Scripture affirms the significance of marriage, proclaiming in Genesis 2:24, "Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh." This divine purpose alone should convince Christians of its value. If it does not, perhaps my testimony will.

A WORTHWHILE JOURNEY

Being married to a godly woman who loves and seeks the Lord is the greatest experience of my life. She has helped me understand God's love, made me more effective for His Kingdom, and has been my constant companion for over twenty years. I could not imagine walking through life without her. However, things were not always this way.

"I will run to you" is a line from a song I wrote for my wife during a desperate marital season. In the message and tone of the music I expressed my determination to fight for my wife to stay in my life. This was a low point where couples either decide to flee their troubles through divorce or fight for their union. Practically speaking, at that time, separation would not have been difficult. We had no assets or children and could have left to start new lives elsewhere. Yet, I could not let go, even if part of me wanted to.

I still remember the first time my wife suggested we consider separation. It was a terrible moment and the first time I realized how strained things had become between us. The beautiful girl I had fallen in love with suggested we thoughtfully consider whether staying together was best for us.

That night, I could not sleep. Tears streamed down my face as I lay awake, desperately praying for guidance for God to show me what to do. Eventually, anger took hold of me. "How dare she suggest such a thing!" I thought. After all, she was a good Christian girl from a believing family; divorce was not supposed to be a choice on the table. Anger continued to build inside me. I thought with malicious satisfaction about how she would struggle without me. She was not earning much then, and a selfish part of me enjoyed the thought of her failing. She would soon realize my value and how good I had been to her, and she would return, begging for forgiveness. After stewing in anger, the sadness returned. The girl who promised her everlasting love was contemplating letting me go. "How did this happen? How did we get here?"

As tears continued to fall, I wondered how an emotion could cause such physical agony. Flooded with questions, I prayed more, looking to hear from God. A calm overcame me, and God captured my attention with a wave of peace. He spoke to me directly, saying, "You cannot change her. You can only change yourself." That message and the enveloping peace, assuring me that everything would be okay, finally helped me fall asleep. I realized then that the situation was entirely in God's hands. No matter the outcome, I knew God would be with me.

I wish I could say things instantly improved. However, I am grateful they did not because, with our shared struggles, we learned more. What did begin to unfold was my growing realization of how much I contributed to our struggles.

In the weeks that followed, I burdened my wife more than anything. Unbeknownst to me, she was having internal struggles with her identity, trying to determine who she was apart from me. This ultimately resigned her to the idea that our marriage was beyond saving. My attempts to “save it” only frustrated her further. I suggested counseling, an idea she dismissed. I bought a book on marriage and diligently followed its advice, only to feel her drift further away. My actions were so drastically different that she justifiably doubted their authenticity. She was right to question them; my desperation to save our marriage led me to say and do anything, regardless of my true feelings, hoping to see her look at me with genuine love again. However, I had conditioned her to see me as the standard, selfish version of myself, making it hard for her to take my efforts seriously.

However, God was changing me. Desperation drove me to seek God with newfound intensity, and He revealed much about my character that needed refining. His message that I could only change myself ignited my desire to understand and improve. What I found was disturbing. I was self-absorbed and prideful, traits that surprised even me. Years of believing I was her hero crumbled as I faced the reality of my selfishness. Throughout our marriage, I had belittled, neglected, and estranged her with my behavior. Recognizing my faults was a painful process, and change came slowly, but it was happening.

The most significant shift was my commitment to my wife. I resolved to stay faithful even if she chose to leave me. I vowed never to abandon my promise before God to love His daughter for all my days. Thankfully, my resolve was never tested, but it shaped my mindset leading up to a pivotal moment.

One Sunday, after church, we found ourselves lying together in bed, which opened the door to more intimate conversation. I told her of my undying love and assured her that, even if we parted ways, I would support her without any need for legal proceedings. I would take on our debts, let her keep the car, and help her financially as she moved on. This gesture overwhelmed her. “Who would do something like that?” she exclaimed. The idea of someone she considered leaving still wanting to support her was too much. An act of sacrificial, limitless love shifted her heart and drew her back to me. I am not trying to glorify myself—I was a complete dolt. The love I expressed then was not mine; it flowed through me from God.

The love of Jesus was what truly overwhelmed her that day. His loving kindness beckoned her back to me. God was right! Changing my wife was not within my power; I could only change myself. Yet, I realized that God was using my transformation as a catalyst for hers. He did not rely on my efforts to confront or coerce her. Instead, He used the love He instilled in me, which overflowed into her heart, reminding her of her cherished status in God's eyes.

It took about a year from that moment for my wife to fully recommit herself to our marriage. The journey was not instant; it oscillated between moments of rapturous joy and intense pain. It was an extended period of rediscovering the essence of true love, the purpose of marriage, and how these concepts weave together into the divine institution established by God. Saving our marriage required patience, support from friends and family, and an earnest pursuit of Jesus, the savior of all humanity. It demanded a fighting spirit that declared, "The devil will not win this battle." Yet, the question remains—was the struggle worth it?

THE VALUE OF A GODLY WOMAN

A fight for a good marriage is inevitable. If you want a thriving marriage, you must be willing to work for it. This struggle arises because the forces of darkness aim to dismantle your union, the selfish nature within you prioritizes your needs over your spouse's, and there is often a temptation to seek the path of least resistance rather than investing the effort required to love and cherish your wife genuinely. When a young man weighs the merits of marriage, he naturally questions, "Is the battle for a good marriage worthwhile?" Scripture offers insight into this question by teaching that woman was made to bring man to completion, compliment Him in his purpose, and bring him enormous wisdom and satisfaction.

Scripture teaches us that God created woman for man (1 Corinthians 11:9), not in a servile context, but as a companion that brought man to completion. Eve was fashioned to complement Adam, fulfilling both relational and existential voids. Consider God's declaration upon creating Eve:

THEN THE LORD GOD SAID, "IT IS NOT GOOD THAT THE MAN SHOULD BE ALONE; I WILL MAKE HIM A HELPER FIT FOR HIM." GENESIS 2:18
ESV

God saw Adam's solitude in his endeavors and concluded that solitude was "not good"—the first instance in Scripture where God denotes something as such. It is noteworthy that God chose to create Eve, a woman, instead of another man, underscoring that she fulfilled specific inner needs in Adam that a man could not.

This introduces another crucial point: man requires union with a woman to fully embody God's image on Earth. God designed humanity to reflect His image on the earth, bringing His rule and reign over all creation as its stewards. Alone, a man is unable to sufficiently reflect God's image. Thus, God designed women to complement men, enriching them in relational dynamics and humanity's overarching purpose.

Scripture also highlights that a wife brings enormous value and satisfaction to her husband. She is a gift from God, a treasure to be cherished, a beauty to be desired, a counselor to be consulted, a wellspring to drink from, and a manager to be depended upon. We will examine each of these attributes, but first, it is essential to note the distinct way God speaks of a wife's role compared to a husband's.

Scripture's discourse on a man's relationship with his wife often revolves around his responsibilities towards her. Conversely, when discussing a woman's relationship with her husband, while duties are acknowledged (e.g., wives, submit to your husbands), there is a stronger focus on the value a wife adds to her husband's life. The overriding message to men is, "This is what you owe your wife." To women, the message is, "This is the value you bring to your husband." If scripture emphasizes the value of a wife, it is worth a man's time and effort to pursue marriage and fulfill his obligations⁷. What exactly are these benefits? Let us explore them one by one.

TREASURE TO CHERISH

A wife is an eternal treasure to cherish who brings incomprehensible joy to her husband. My wife is invaluable to me. She is my most precious treasure, and caring for her brings me happiness and fulfillment. The book of Proverbs states:

**AN EXCELLENT WIFE WHO CAN FIND? SHE IS FAR MORE PRECIOUS
THAN JEWELS. THE HEART OF HER HUSBAND TRUSTS IN HER, AND HE
WILL HAVE NO LACK OF GAIN. PROVERBS 31:10-11 ESV**

A virtuous and capable wife is "more precious than jewels." Treasuring something—

be it a sentimental item, something rare, or of significant value—means treating it with the utmost care and respect. It involves going to great lengths to protect and preserve it.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus instructs His followers to seek eternal treasures that will never fade (Matthew 6:19-22). If the scriptures tell us that a wife is a gift to treasure, then she is certainly worth every effort. Why? Because she brings to her husband a sense of joy that will never diminish.

BEAUTY TO DESIRE

The Bible teaches us one of the most tangible benefits of having a wife: enjoying a woman's beauty through mental, emotional, and physical intimacy. This aspect of marriage is among the most fulfilling for men, and Scripture addresses it candidly:

**SHE IS A LOVING DEER, A GRACEFUL DOE. LET HER BREASTS SATISFY
YOU ALWAYS. MAY YOU ALWAYS BE CAPTIVATED BY HER LOVE.
PROVERBS 5:19 NLT**

The Song of Songs, an entire book of the Bible, delves into the profound mystery of love between two people. It highlights the significance of physical intimacy, which God designed to be uniquely experienced between a husband and wife. The joy of intimacy with a wife cannot be overstated or undersold.

COUNSELOR TO SEEK

A wife brings invaluable wisdom to a marriage. Wise husbands appreciate and heed the counsel provided by their wives, recognizing the unique perspective they offer. Scripture highlights this wisdom:

**SHE OPENS HER MOUTH WITH WISDOM, AND THE TEACHING OF
KINDNESS IS ON HER TONGUE. PROVERBS 31:26 ESV**

One of the most significant advantages of marriage is the unity with someone whose feminine nature offers a different viewpoint. Valuing the female perspective enriches one's life and fosters a partnership that enhances decision-making and effectiveness.

WELLSPRING TO DRINK

A wife is a continuous source of life and rejuvenation. Scripture sets a wife apart as a distinct blessing, advising husbands to “drink water” from her. Consider this verse:

DRINK WATER FROM YOUR OWN WELL— SHARE YOUR LOVE ONLY WITH YOUR WIFE. LET YOUR WIFE BE A FOUNTAIN OF BLESSING FOR YOU. REJOICE IN THE WIFE OF YOUR YOUTH. PROVERBS 5:15,18 NLT

This highlights another significant advantage of marriage: constant refreshment from engaging with your wife’s soul and body, much like a fountain offering daily refreshment. It is hard to express what this feels like, but the closest I can describe it is a renewed strength, as if her love infuses vitality into the soul.

MANAGER TO RELY ON

My wife’s ability to organize and manage has always amazed me. The navigation of her life and our family’s is a tremendous asset. Scripture praises such capabilities:

SHE IS ENERGETIC AND STRONG, A HARD WORKER. SHE CAREFULLY WATCHES OVER EVERYTHING IN HER HOUSEHOLD AND SUFFERS NOTHING FROM LAZINESS. PROVERBS 31:17, 27 NLT

When I take on managerial roles in our family, I find them overwhelmingly challenging—a sentiment shared by many men. The female mind is uniquely equipped for multitasking and management in ways that can baffle men. My wife, for instance, can simultaneously manage many tasks while remaining focused and attentive to the present moment. This is not to say we should not share the physical and cognitive load of managing domestic affairs. However, women possess unique qualities that often enable them to excel in this area, and having a wife to partner with in your home is a profound blessing.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

TO THE UNMARRIED MAN

If you are unmarried and reading this list, you might think it sounds too good to be true. You may wonder how a man can receive all this goodness from a woman. I assure you it is possible because I have experienced these blessings in my marriage.

I have two pieces of advice for those who may feel this way. First, understand that while having a wife can be an enormous blessing, marriage is not solely about your happiness. When you grasp the multi-faceted purposes of marriage, you will be in a better position to experience the joy that comes from it. God designed marriage to foster human flourishing and bring His rule and reign into the world. Entering marriage makes you a participant in these broader purposes.

Second, choosing your partner wisely makes these blessings more likely to be realized. It is easy for a young man to be captivated by a woman's beauty, which is vital—it's natural to be attracted to your future wife. However, attraction should not be the sole criterion. A love for God and alignment of values are far more critical considerations for a lasting marriage.

Whatever happens, do not despair. God can work with and redeem any situation. His plans may involve facing challenges as He shapes you into the man He wants you to be. Nonetheless, it is wise to seek a woman who embodies or aspires to these essential qualities before you get married, as this could help you avoid unnecessary difficulties in the future.

TO THE MARRIED MAN

If you are married and, reflecting on this list, feel that your wife lacks many or all of these qualities, and it has been a while since you have seen these traits in her, I encourage you to consider a few perspectives.

First, the alleged shortcomings you see in your wife are often false perceptions of your selfish desires. You likely have a wrong set of expectations you walked into marriage with. Our culture has influenced our minds to think we deserve certain things; thus, we have a right to be angry. I encourage you to stay open to the idea that you could be the one with shortcomings that have affected your wife. Be humble enough to realize that you have played a role.

Moreover, scripture outlines the potential of what your wife could become, even if you think she has not reached it yet. If you perceive she falls short in certain areas, loving her for the person she was created to be—not solely for who she is now—is the best way to lead her to that potential. This also mirrors how God loves us: seeing us in our totality, recognizing our potential, and gently nudging us toward His will.

If Scripture considers a wife a gift and a treasure to her husband, then she indeed has the potential to embody that role.

In other words, focus on your personal growth—not hers. You cannot change your wife; you can only change yourself. Become a man your wife can't wait to follow, respect, and love.

Second, God led you to your current wife by His sovereign design. No one is more suitable for you, and God hates divorce (Malachi 2:16). Say the following phrase aloud with conviction, “*God affirms there is no one better for me than my current wife.*” The notion that the grass is greener elsewhere is a misconception. Often, the issue may not lie with your wife but within yourself. Remember, you are a constant in every relationship you enter.

Acknowledging my shortcomings was among the most brutal realizations in addressing my marriage's challenges. It demands humility and openness to let God illuminate your failings and guide you toward self-improvement. Finding my wife's faults was straightforward; confronting my own required much more effort. This process involved earnestly seeking God through prayer, engaging with marriage-focused literature, consulting men who exemplify strong marriages, and genuinely listening to my wife's insights. This path is not easy—it can be intensely demanding. Yet, the journey is profoundly rewarding. As we will explore in the next chapter, the benefits extend beyond a joyous marriage to a fulfilling life. This pursuit aligns with one of God's core purposes for us and paves the way to greatness. Are you aiming for greatness, a meaningful life, joy, and happiness? Loving your wife is integral to these goals. Let us delve deeper to understand why.

Section 2

MARRIAGE
FOUNDATIONS

Chapter Two

Marriage Foundations

REMEMBER THIS AND STAND FIRM, RECALL IT TO MIND, YOU
TRANSGRESSORS, REMEMBER THE FORMER THINGS OF OLD; FOR I AM
GOD, AND THERE IS NO OTHER; I AM GOD, AND THERE IS NONE LIKE
ME, DECLARING THE END FROM THE BEGINNING AND FROM ANCIENT
TIMES THINGS NOT YET DONE, SAYING, 'MY COUNSEL SHALL STAND,
AND I WILL ACCOMPLISH ALL MY PURPOSE,' ISAIAH46:8-10 ESV

When I was younger, I did not believe in destiny. I doubted the idea that there was one person meant for me to marry. Beginning my relationship with my wife made me feel differently like I was destined to be with her, yet a part of me considered this illusory. I was simply fortunate. Random chance had led me to the perfect woman, and I was determined not to lose her. While I did not think God crafted a specific plan for everyone, I certainly thought He blessed them for doing the right things. Therefore, my future was in my hands, not His, and personal success depended on my dedication to His causes. Greatness was achievable, but only if I pursued it with conviction. It was the planning, striving, and action that God blessed.

Now, there is nothing wrong with planning and vigorous work. Committing with unwavering determination to a woman, working diligently for God's Kingdom, and planning for the future is indeed good and proper. My error was to place both the burden and the credit on myself. If I succeeded, it was because I had taken the necessary steps. Pride had taken hold of me, diminishing God's role and elevating my own.

The most significant shift to this mindset occurred when I learned about God's omniscience. I understood God was all-knowing but had not fully grasped what that encompassed. Specifically, I realized God knows all contingencies (i.e., if-then scenarios). This concept was mind-blowing because I could not even begin to fathom it. If God knows every variation of events that could happen, then nothing about my life happens by chance. God knew every factor that led to my existence, including human free choices. With such knowledge, God can guide His sovereign will and plans to their perfect realization. This knowledge even allows God to preordain a specific plan for my life. However, this does not make me a bystander; instead, my understanding of who was in control of the outcomes changed.

The realization that God sovereignly guides me brings incredible freedom. I can make mistakes, knowing God has already seen and accounted for them. I do not need to fret over adversities because even challenging times are tools in God's arsenal. He orchestrates everything for the good of those who love Him (Romans 8:28). I can lay out my plans while trusting that God is steering my path toward His purposes (Proverbs 16:9).

In the following two chapters, we will explore the reasons for marriage's existence, uncovering why God created it and His intentions for it. But before we tackle these topics, we must lay a solid foundation. These are vast topics, and you may wonder why you need to know them for marriage. I have found they offer rich and fulfilling insights for my life and marriage. If you invest this time into the foundation, I promise you will not regret it nor fail to see the practical applications stemming from these truths.

GOD IS SOVEREIGN

Why did God create marriage? Just as an inventor designs with a specific purpose, God the Creator acts deliberately. Consider this passage:

I, WISDOM, DWELL WITH PRUDENCE, AND I FIND KNOWLEDGE AND DISCRETION. I HAVE COUNSEL AND SOUND WISDOM; I HAVE INSIGHT; I HAVE STRENGTH. THE LORD POSSESSED ME AT THE BEGINNING OF HIS WORK, THE FIRST OF HIS ACTS OF OLD. THEN I WAS BESIDE HIM, LIKE A MASTER WORKMAN, AND I WAS DAILY HIS DELIGHT, REJOICING

BEFORE HIM ALWAYS, PROVERBS 8:12, 14, 22, 30 ESV

The wisdom of God transcends mere human knowledge and intelligence. It signifies God's flawless, infallible, and all-encompassing understanding and strategy. God does not merely devise plans with the hope they will succeed. He proclaims the outcome from the start and unfailingly fulfills His plan.

I AM GOD, AND THERE IS NONE LIKE ME, DECLARING THE END FROM THE BEGINNING AND FROM ANCIENT TIMES THINGS NOT YET DONE, SAYING, "MY COUNSEL SHALL STAND, AND I WILL ACCOMPLISH ALL MY PURPOSE," ISAIAH 46: 9B-10 ESV

If God's actions are not arbitrary but instead stem from a preordained plan, we can extend this to the institution of marriage. God created marriage with a specific, intentional purpose—a design to foster human flourishing.

Let us go back to the beginning—when there was no time when the concept of beginning had not yet been actualized. God existed alone. God was perfectly content in this state, having no needs, not even the need for community. Due to His triune nature, the Father, the Son, and the Spirit existed in a perfect, harmonious relationship. This was a flawless world inhabited solely by God.

We might envision God in this state as a strategist mapping out our universe⁸. When strategists consider the creation of something new, they distinguish between the purpose of its creation (why it is being created) and its operation or actions (how it will work). These two concepts are function and design.

- The **function** of a new entity relates to its reason for existence. It gives meaning and significance to the created entity, outlining its purpose and role.
- The **design** of a new entity concerns the methods and arrangements through which it fulfills its function. A well-conceived design aims to achieve this function effectively and efficiently.

Humans are constantly creating products, services, organizations, and systems. Our ability for creativity and intelligence can indeed be astonishing, enabling us to achieve feats that inspire awe in others. Despite these abilities, our creations are often flawed, sometimes severely so. While we typically start with positive

intentions, aiming to develop functions that benefit humanity or enhance the world, our efforts can be undermined by our selfish desires and limitations. Unfortunately, this has led to the creation of functions to perpetuate significant harm. Similarly, our designs are often plagued by inefficiency and ineffectiveness, failing to fulfill their intended purpose.

Unlike humans, God never errs in His intended functions and never fails to craft perfect designs. When God creates, it embodies true goodness and worth—it cannot be otherwise. By nature, God is perfect in all His ways. Therefore, His plans, functions, and designs are infallible and cannot be improved upon. Let us examine the specific functions and designs that explain why God created marriage.

FOUNDATIONAL FUNCTIONS AND DESIGNS FOR MARRIAGE

FUNCTION OF THE WORLD

Given that God existed alone in a state of perfection, it raises a curious question: Why would He choose to create a new world? A perfect being, living in a flawless existence, seems to have no reason to introduce something new that, by its very nature, would be inferior to His current state of perfection. It cannot be that He wanted to display His greatness or draw attention to Himself, as He has nothing to prove and is accountable to no one. Additionally, He did not lack companionship, given His eternal communion within the Trinity.

The most plausible explanation lies in God's boundless love. As a being of complete love and moral perfection, God deemed it a greater good to create a world where He could share Himself with free beings in a loving relationship. This act of creation was a profound expression of selflessness, involving God's willingness to condescend to these free creatures. He chose to leave His perfect state so that we could exist and, crucially, experience the presence of God—the greatest gift of all. This suggests that creation was an act of immense self-giving.

It is important to remember that God, in His self-existent state, considered a world populated by free beings, where He could share Himself, to be more meaningful than a world that included only Himself.

The surprising takeaway from this is that God is the ultimate prize we can ever attain. The primary purpose of our world is for free beings to know and be known by their Creator. Understanding this concept has significant implications for all areas of life, including marriage. For now, it suffices to recognize that the essence of life revolves around walking with God, and it is up to each individual to choose whether or not to embrace Him.

DESIGN OF THE WORLD

You will recall that the design of an entity pertains to how it achieves its function. God's design for the world incorporates everything He brought into being to carry out His intended function. If you want to know God's designs, then look around. Observe and learn about all He has made. When you do, you will find wonder, beauty, and majesty in everything. On balance, this is an excellent world we find ourselves in. Yet, you will also find pain, suffering, and death, which may lead you to question the great Designer.

Most discussions about God's designs for the world focus on the existence of evil. How could God create a world where great evils exist? While addressing this question directly would lead us off-topic, it is essential to consider how we should respond to the presence of evil and our unanswered questions about God's designs. Marital relationship struggles could be regarded as one of these evils that leads us to question God's designs for us and the world.

The book of Job concludes with a dialogue between the Lord and Job. In it, God explains that Job's perspective and experience are too limited to comprehend the immense mysteries behind the world's design⁹. While contemplating the underlying reasons for God's design of the world is valuable, a significant part of this reflection must be rooted in faith and trust in God's perfect ways.

I have encountered many individuals who argue that God could have designed the world differently. While this assertion may be technically true, it often implies that they believe they could have done a better job than God. Such a claim is quite bold, especially from beings who exist on a speck of the universe. These individuals suggest that we should place our trust in their wisdom and moral judgment instead of God's, based on the belief that they can identify apparent improvements to our

world that indicate a designer's absence or malevolence.

This perspective is not only unprovable but also demonstrably incorrect. History shows that a world without existential struggles—often considered evils—does not necessarily fare better than one with them. Ultimately, the main takeaway is that we are called to trust God's designs, even when we cannot fully understand or explain them. This perspective encourages us to view the trials and tribulations we experience through a lens of spiritual growth and refinement.

You will encounter challenges in your marriage. You have two options for responding. First, you can turn away from God and reject the idea of His presence, choosing instead to take control of your own life and rely on your solutions. This can lead to a miserable and uninspired existence. Alternatively, you can place your trust in God's guidance, embrace the benefits of a faith-filled life grounded in trust, and witness how God unfolds His master plan in your marriage and life.

FUNCTION OF HUMANITY

This brings us to ask why God created humanity. In short, God created humans to rule and reign over the earth.

THEN GOD SAID, "LET US MAKE MAN IN OUR IMAGE, AFTER OUR LIKENESS. AND LET THEM HAVE DOMINION OVER THE FISH OF THE SEA AND OVER THE BIRDS OF THE HEAVENS AND OVER THE LIVESTOCK AND OVER ALL THE EARTH AND OVER EVERY CREEPING THING THAT CREEPS ON THE EARTH." GENESIS 1:26 ESV

Scripture repeatedly shows how God takes pleasure in partnering with His creation to implement His sovereign will. He collaborates with humans like Noah, Abraham, Moses, and David to fulfill His purposes. Additionally, God works with angels to convey messages and carry out judgments. He even consults with an angelic council in heaven to make decisions and act (1 Kings 22:19-23). God does not need to work in this manner. He can do anything through His own will and power. Nevertheless, He chooses to partner with His free creatures.

Scripture does not explicitly explain why God works this way. However, if we consider the primary function of the world—to share God with free creatures—it

becomes highly plausible that one of the main ways God shares Himself is through partnerships with humans. Having served as a worship leader, I have continually marveled at how God allows me to participate in His Kingdom by leading others in worship. It feels like an extraordinary privilege to guide others in song and spirit and watch how God completes the work. This experience enriches my heart and imbues my life with a profound sense of value and meaning.

My experience is but one among millions that illustrate what it is like to be used by God. While my example is rooted in church ministry, the scope of such divine partnership extends far beyond. Humans collaborate with God across various spheres, including culture, politics, government, business, and societal institutions. God partners with inventors, builders, farmers, laborers, servers, cleaners, and people from all walks of life. Anyone who reflects God's image in a way that aligns with His goodness, consciously or unconsciously, is in partnership with God.

DESIGN OF HUMANITY

This brings us to the design of humanity. Scripture tells us that God created humans in His image. In the very first chapter of the Bible, it says:

**SO GOD CREATED MAN IN HIS OWN IMAGE, IN THE IMAGE OF GOD HE
CREATED HIM; MALE AND FEMALE HE CREATED THEM. GENESIS 1:27
ESV**

Being made in God's image means we reflect His attributes. God's nature encompasses a wide range of qualities that we, in a limited way, reflect in our nature. For example, God's omniscience—His attribute of knowing everything—covers knowledge of all past, present, and future events and understanding how things could have been different. Similarly, we can learn, remember, and reflect on our past, understand our current circumstances, and make predictions. We can also imagine how different scenarios, such as birth in another country, might have changed our lives.

Being made in God's image imparts immense, inherent value to every individual, irrespective of identity or origin. This is the great equalizer among all humanity, as we all reflect God's image. This divine imprint distinguishes us from all other living creatures, endowing us with mental and spiritual abilities that allow us to achieve remarkable feats, engage with the spiritual realm, and live forever. Bearing God's

image is a profound privilege and serves as a reminder of the significance we should place on the value of every person.

THE FUNCTION OF GENDER

The Bible identifies only one point of human diversity concerning God's image: gender. This human distinction is the first mentioned in the Bible and the only one highlighted during the creation narrative. The emphasis on gender underscores its importance in understanding our natures. It serves as the first sign that males and females are distinct, implying that they reflect God's image in complementary but diverse ways.

If gender is significant enough to highlight in this manner, then the question arises: what is the purpose of gender? While Scripture does not directly answer this question, we can infer the purpose by examining God's designs for gender. In the book of Genesis, we find:

THEN THE LORD GOD SAID, "IT IS NOT GOOD THAT THE MAN SHOULD BE ALONE; I WILL MAKE HIM A HELPER FIT FOR HIM." AND THE RIB THAT THE LORD GOD HAD TAKEN FROM THE MAN HE MADE INTO A WOMAN AND BROUGHT HER TO THE MAN. THEN THE MAN SAID, "THIS AT LAST IS BONE OF MY BONES AND FLESH OF MY FLESH; SHE SHALL BE CALLED WOMAN, BECAUSE SHE WAS TAKEN OUT OF MAN." GENESIS 2:18, 22-23 ESV

God declared that man's solitude was "not good." Yet, instead of creating another man, God made a woman! This distinction is crucial, indicating that man's solitude was undesirable not merely because he was alone but also because he was incomplete without a woman. From this observation, we can deduce two significant insights: first, humans are inherently designed for community, not independence, and second, men and women complement each other meaningfully. About the latter point, the mere act of God creating the opposite gender signifies that man alone was insufficient to fulfill God's function for humanity. Women were necessary to complement and complete men.

Reflecting on this and revisiting Genesis 1:27, men and women were created to mirror God's image, but this does not imply they reflect Him the same way. Men

and women are distinct yet complementary beings. Consequently, it is reasonable to propose that God's purpose for gender is to reflect His image more fully through the complementary characteristics of man and woman.

THE DESIGN OF GENDER

Throughout Scripture, gender is consistently presented in binary terms: male and female. This understanding is crucial, especially when considering its significant implications for the design of marriage.

We see God's established differences between genders in our daily lives. While exceptions exist, gender norms have developed and persisted due to the inherent differences between men and women. For instance, activities like hunting, construction, or participating in fantasy sports leagues might attract some women. Still, these are male-dominated activities because they align more closely with the nature God endowed in men. Similarly, some men work in childcare, enjoy yoga, or use Pinterest, but they are outliers because these activities align more closely to the female nature. While it is likely that societal stereotypes and historical roles contribute to some observed gender differences, they do not fully account for all of them. Indeed, considerable research highlights known natural and persistent differences between males and females, such as:

- Men tend to have greater upper body strength, while women tend to have greater lower body strength relative to size¹⁰.
- Women tend to be more verbally fluent and score higher on verbal intelligence tests¹¹.
- Men do better on specific spatial skills and mathematical reasoning tests^{12,13}.
- Women tend to be better at tasks requiring fine motor skills and dexterity^{14,15}.
- Men tend to excel more at targeting and navigating objectives^{16,17}.
- Women are better at discerning subtle emotional cues and expressions^{18,19}.

The bottom line is this: men and women are different by design, with distinctions rooted in their very nature—and that is something to be celebrated. Each sex reflects God in a unique and meaningful way, and when their strengths are united through the covenant of marriage, the result is a powerful force for good and lasting impact²⁰.

Accepting God's design for gender as the most conducive to human flourishing

ultimately rests on faith. Indeed, God could have structured gender differently. He might have created a single or infinite array of genders capable of fully expressing His image. However, He only made two: male and female. Just as we trust God's designs for the world, we must also trust His designs for gender. After all, He alone has the wisdom necessary to determine the best design for achieving His purposes²¹.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

You might be asking yourself, "Why did I need to know all that? Isn't this book about marriage?" Absolutely. And understanding why marriage exists is crucial to thriving in it. We cannot grasp the 'why' without first exploring the bedrock truths.

The concepts have real-world applications for your life and marriage. Trust me, a year from now, you'll likely reflect on some aspect of your relationship and link it back to these ideas. I have experienced this countless times. For instance, my wife has endured significant physical suffering over the years due to various illnesses and allergies. We often questioned why. Shouldn't God care more about her physical well-being? We wondered if perhaps her suffering had a higher purpose—maybe it was to draw someone else to God. Though we cannot confirm this, if true, then her suffering was meaningful, especially since it has eased considerably in recent years. Praise be to God!

Understanding God's intentions provides valuable insights into our personal lives and marriages. God wants to know us and share His love. He assigns specific purposes to our lives, realized only by embracing His design. We are not random products of cosmic chance. God approaches everything with intentionality, including our marriages, guiding us to discover our unique purpose.

Commit to pondering these topics more often. They will nourish your soul and bring you joy. Now, let's delve into the many wonderful purposes of marriage!

Chapter Three

The Function of Marriage

THEREFORE A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND HIS MOTHER AND
HOLD FAST TO HIS WIFE, AND THEY SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH.

GENESIS 2:24 ESV

My family and I were breakfasting at an unfamiliar restaurant. Everyone was enjoying the ambiance and having a pleasant time. It was one of those rare moments when there was no need to hurry. You could take your time savoring the new sights, fresh food, hot coffee, and, most importantly, one another's company. As I sat there watching my beautiful daughters, I felt a sense of joy from God for the blessings in my life. Each of my daughters looked so beautiful, and I appreciated the unique mannerisms they brought to our family dynamic. My gaze then shifted to my stunning wife, smiling and laughing, and I thought, "A few small changes and all of this might never have been."

I met my wife in high school. It did not take long for us to fall in love and desire marriage. We spent five years together, eagerly expecting what we knew was inevitable. Marriage became our goal, and we discussed it at every opportunity.

We married in January on an unusually warm day, reaching 76 degrees. I was thrilled throughout the day, and as we were changing in a back room of our church to head to our hotel, I remember thinking, "This is the start of our whole life together." I was brimming with anticipation. This feeling was partly because we were on our way to our honeymoon but also because I knew something special had begun that

day: a new life.

That new life was smooth sailing for a few weeks, but something started to shift. It was not our love for each other; neither of us experienced a falling out of love. The real problem was that we never considered what that love meant. Having focused on achieving marriage for so many years, we did not understand how it worked or what to do with it once we reached it.

Marriage was supposed to bring us blissful happiness, or so we thought. However, as wonderful as it is, love alone cannot satisfy us. We began to yearn for more, but we had no idea what that “more” was. Worse, we looked to one another for the satisfaction of this “more,” something neither of us could fulfill. We could not satisfy each other partly because only God could truly bring the fulfillment we needed and partly because we were unaware of how God brings that fulfillment through us. What we were longing for was purpose.

My wife and I are naturally goal-oriented. It is second nature for us to set goals and work diligently towards them until we achieve them. While most people have this trait, we apply it in every aspect of our lives, often subconsciously. This approach works well when both partners are united in their goals. The challenge arose when we found ourselves without shared goals for a time. The future lay before us, brimming with possibilities, and we did not want to squander it. However, not knowing exactly what we were striving for led us to talk past each other in our search for a common purpose.

Our difficulty finding a shared purpose was due to my selfishness and a lack of understanding of the institution I had just entered. As a man, I aspired to achieve greatness in my life but did not recognize the greatness right before me, accessible and waiting. I was seeking greatness in the wrong places, and this misguided pursuit spilled over into my marriage. I needed to grasp the true purpose of marriage.

THE FUNCTION OF MARRIAGE

Marriage is a system designed by God with a clear function. We have previously explored various function-design pairings for the world, humanity, and gender. To review, these were:

SYSTEM	FUNCTION	DESIGN
World	Share God's relational love with free creatures.	All things brought into being by God.
Humanity	Rule and reign over the earth in partnership with God.	In God's image as male and female genders.
Gender	Reflect God's image holistically.	Different, but complementary, expressions of male and female attributes.

With this foundational context in mind, let us explore the function of marriage. Do you recall the illustration of God as a strategic planner who designs the world? In this imagined role, He envisions the grand outcome of sharing His perfect love with creatures who have free will and develops various systems to achieve this. To this end, He creates humans with free will, endowing them with the meaningful purpose of stewarding the earth. He makes them male and female, as a duality that reflects His image. But how does He ensure that humanity fully engages in this collaboration to glorify God?

The Bible first mentions marriage in the context of Adam doing his work.

NOW OUT OF THE GROUND THE LORD GOD HAD FORMED EVERY BEAST OF THE FIELD AND EVERY BIRD OF THE HEAVENS AND BROUGHT THEM TO THE MAN TO SEE WHAT HE WOULD CALL THEM. AND WHATEVER THE MAN CALLED EVERY LIVING CREATURE, THAT WAS ITS NAME. THE MAN GAVE NAMES TO ALL LIVESTOCK AND TO THE BIRDS OF THE HEAVENS AND TO EVERY BEAST OF THE FIELD. BUT FOR ADAM THERE WAS NOT FOUND A HELPER FIT FOR HIM. GENESIS 2:19-20 ESV

In this scene, man's partnership with God runs harmoniously. God presents animals to Adam for naming, and respects his choices because he was granted dominion over them. Adam fulfills his purpose by naming the animals. Yet, God sees that there is no suitable helper. Consequently, God creates woman to complete and complement man.

THEN THE LORD GOD SAID, "IT IS NOT GOOD THAT THE MAN SHOULD BE ALONE; I WILL MAKE HIM A HELPER FIT FOR HIM." SO THE LORD GOD CAUSED A DEEP SLEEP TO FALL UPON THE MAN, AND WHILE HE SLEPT TOOK ONE OF HIS RIBS AND CLOSED UP ITS PLACE WITH FLESH. AND THE RIB THAT THE LORD GOD HAD TAKEN FROM THE MAN HE MADE INTO A WOMAN AND BROUGHT HER TO THE MAN. GENESIS 2:18, 21-22 ESV

Following this, God creates the institution of marriage, uniting man and woman in a partnership that reflects His design and purpose.

THEREFORE A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND HIS MOTHER AND HOLD FAST TO HIS WIFE, AND THEY SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH. GENESIS 2:24 ESV

This passage does not imply inferiority, ownership, or inequality. Instead, it highlights a commitment to perpetual unity. The man and woman are to be so united that they resemble one flesh, behaving as one entity in their thoughts, words, and actions. But what for? The context answers: they are united to steward the earth in partnership with God.

Men and women, created in God's image, are meant to govern in partnership with God, manifested through the institution of marriage. It is not an exaggeration to say that marriage is the primary mechanism for fulfilling humanity's role in God's creation. Marriage formalizes the gender construct through a lifelong union between one man and one woman, aimed at stewarding the earth in collaboration with God.

Reflecting on that statement might evoke a sense of letdown. We are conditioned to look forward to marriage for the love, companionship, and fulfillment it promises. When measured against these personal motivators, the broader purpose of

marriage may seem unexciting or mundane. Yet, this broader purpose is so much better than we could have ever imagined. Happiness is a part of marriage, but it is crucial to recognize that the goal we are invited to participate in transcends our surface expectations.

These foundational truths can transform your actions in marriage more significantly than anything else. Once you fully understand them, your focus shifts from yourself to the higher purpose God has for your life and marriage. You begin to see how much God wants to accomplish through you, reaching beyond your wildest dreams, even if you cannot yet envision it²².

Therefore, the profound purpose of marriage lies in its role as the structural and foundational cornerstone society needs to thrive. It has served as the bedrock of communities for millennia, acting as the nucleus around which every society is built. Marriage ensures stability and offers comprehensive care for children from both a mother and a father. It fosters unity among people and amplifies the effectiveness and influence of both partners, enabling them to fulfill unique purposes that would be challenging to achieve independently. It is hard to envision any alternative institution or entity that could replicate the achievements God has facilitated through marriage. Yet, the benefits of marriage extend even further, with complementary functions still to explore.

COMPLEMENTARY PURPOSES OF MARRIAGE

As we explore the following complementary functions of marriage, it is crucial to emphasize that these are not lesser functions. We serve an incredible God who weaves and aligns all things toward His sovereign purposes, integrating the various aspects of marriage into a cohesive whole that fulfills His design and intentions for humanity.

HUMAN PROCREATION

One noticeably clear purpose of marriage is to have children. According to Genesis 1:28, God instructed humanity to populate the earth; marriage is His designated way to achieve this. Intended to last a lifetime, marriage is the perfect environment for raising children. Mom and Dad give children a complete picture of God's image and educate them on His intentions for each gender, often without even knowing that

is what they are doing. Marriage also serves as an excellent means of transmitting wisdom and virtues to the next generation.

LOVE AND COMPANIONSHIP

Establishing lifelong relational love and companionship between a husband and wife is a remarkable function of marriage. In the creation narrative, God repeatedly declares His creation good, yet the first instance He finds something as “not good” pertains to Adam’s solitude (Genesis 2:18). Adam’s joy is palpable when God presents Eve to him as he exclaims, “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh,” (Genesis 2:23a), showing his yearning for human love and companionship. This longing is noteworthy because it is felt even in the perfection of the Garden of Eden, alongside God, before the fall. This suggests that while God fulfills our spiritual needs, He also built in us an inherent need for human connection. This intrinsic desire for companionship and love between husband and wife is celebrated in the Song of Songs:

PLACE ME LIKE A SEAL OVER YOUR HEART, LIKE A SEAL ON YOUR ARM;
FOR LOVE IS AS STRONG AS DEATH, ITS JEALOUSY UNYIELDING AS THE
GRAVE. IT BURNS LIKE BLAZING FIRE, LIKE A MIGHTY FLAME. MANY
WATERS CANNOT QUENCH LOVE; RIVERS CANNOT SWEEP IT AWAY. IF
ONE WERE TO GIVE ALL THE WEALTH OF ONE’S HOUSE FOR LOVE, IT
WOULD BE UTTERLY SCORNE. SONG OF SONGS 8:6-7 NIV

These verses, a sampling of many, illuminate the intensity of love between a husband and wife. God designed marriage to satisfy our innate human longing for love and connection, enriching our lives in the most meaningful ways.

SANCTIFICATION OF INDIVIDUALS

If you are unfamiliar with the term sanctification, it refers to the process every believer undergoes to gain power over sin after dedicating their life to Jesus. Upon accepting Christ, you do not become instantly perfect, nor do the temptations in your life vanish. Sometimes, people experience immediate internal changes, and things that previously held power over them lose their grip. Yet, for most individuals, overcoming sin and becoming more like Christ is a gradual process.

When you accept Christ into your heart, the Holy Spirit—God Himself—comes

to live within you and change you (Acts 2:38)²³. Pleasures, interests, activities, environments, and people once enjoyed feel uncomfortable and draining. These sensations are signs of God gradually transforming you into who He intends you to be. Thankfully, this transformation does not occur overnight. Imagine if God simultaneously addressed every shortcoming in your life—I doubt many could endure such a revelation. This gradual change is yet another testament to His grace and patience.

Why does God choose this method? Could not God transform us instantly? Indeed, He could. God has the power to change us supernaturally in a moment. If you were to die tomorrow, you would enter God's presence free from sin, wholly sanctified, without undergoing any refining process. So, why the wait? Recall that God has specific functions in mind for His world and humanity. We are free beings with whom God desires a loving relationship, and He wishes for everyone on earth to come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9). The sanctification of individuals plays a crucial role in this overarching purpose.

As you allow God to shape you into His image, becoming more like Christ, people will start noticing the transformation. You will not be able to conceal it because the One living within you yearns to use you to attract others into the same remarkable experiential love and communion. God keeps you in this life rather than instantly transforming you into a perfect state so that others can witness the change within you and yearn for it themselves.

Marriage serves as one of God's instruments to sanctify and refine individuals, aiding them in becoming more like Christ²⁴. Through the joys and challenges of marriage, both partners receive opportunities for growth, character development, and deeper alignment with God's character and purposes. How does this work? Like a mirror.

Nothing reveals your true self quite like those closest to you. Marriage is an incredibly intimate experience that continuously exposes both the best and worst parts of who you are. In a healthy marriage, your spouse observes and examines every action you take. Over time, they come to know you so well that hiding your true feelings becomes impossible. Your spirits become so aligned that they can sense your moods and thoughts.

My wife and I experience this regularly. We have lost the ability to be insincere with each other due to the depth of our intimacy. It's a beautiful aspect of our relationship that deserves to be celebrated. However, there is a challenge: our individual moods and thoughts always influence both of us. Positive feelings uplift them, while negative ones can bring them down.

This dynamic is why intimacy in marriage is an important goal. The intimacy between husband and wife serves as a mirror, revealing when they are succumbing to feelings that are not aligned with the Lord's spirit. God uses marital intimacy to shine a light on sin to help us get back to the right path.

This is why you should pay close attention to how your wife responds—not just to your actions, but to the overall spirit you carry. By spirit, I mean the posture of your soul—your attitude, tone, and presence—and how it impacts those around you. More often than not, your wife will call you to a higher standard, and it takes a truly strong and humble man to receive that correction with grace. In the end, you should thank her for the courage and love it takes to point out where growth is needed. Receiving her input with humility will shape you into a man who honors Christ in both character and conduct.

REFLECTION OF CHRIST AND THE CHURCH

One more function of marriage worth exploring is its role as a reflection of Christ's relationship with His church. Paul introduces this analogy in his Epistle to the Ephesians, drawing parallels between marriage's loving, sacrificial bond and Christ's devoted relationship with the church.

**FOR NO ONE EVER HATED HIS OWN FLESH, BUT NOURISHES AND
CHERISHES IT, JUST AS CHRIST DOES THE CHURCH, BECAUSE WE ARE
MEMBERS OF HIS BODY. "THEREFORE A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER
AND MOTHER AND HOLD FAST TO HIS WIFE, AND THE TWO SHALL
BECOME ONE FLESH." THIS MYSTERY IS PROFOUND, AND I AM SAYING
THAT IT REFERS TO CHRIST AND THE CHURCH. EPHESIANS 5:29-32 ESV**

While guiding married couples, Paul offers insight into Christ's relationship with the church. Christ's sanctifying work on behalf of the church mirrors the love and care a husband is to have for his wife. This comparison can be understood in two

interrelated ways, both of which are correct. The passage uses the relationship between Christ and the church to illustrate Christ's deep love for the church and as a model for how a husband should love his wife.

MARRIAGE AS A REFLECTION OF CHRIST'S LOVE

Marriage is the most intimate of human relationships, making it the ideal comparison to depict Christ's love for the church (believers in Christ Jesus). The imagery of marriage aids us, as individual believers, to understand the depth of intimacy God desires with us. In a well-functioning marriage, husbands and wives are united to the point where they are described by scripture as "one flesh" (Genesis 2:24). Consider this personally for a moment. You are meant to be so intimately familiar with your spouse's thoughts and feelings that it is as if you are one entity. Achieving this level of unity requires time and sacrifice, and I believe it cannot be fully perfected in this life. Nonetheless, this is the unity we are encouraged to reach in our marriage, representing the unity Christ seeks with His church. Why is this significant?

When this life concludes, and we enter eternity, we will always experience perfect intimacy with God (Revelation 21:3). God will vanquish all sin and bring everything to perfection (Revelation 21:4), including human relationships. Indeed, human relationships will become so pure that the construct of marriage will no longer be necessary (Matthew 22:30).

Understanding these truths helps us keep the proper perspective on marriage. Marriage is an incredible privilege and joy we are fortunate to experience in this epoch as we await the new heavens and earth. It foreshadows the love and intimacy that will come with our arriving King, yet it remains a temporary construct pointing to a greater reality.

Think back to a time when you felt a deep spiritual and emotional connection with your spouse. The intensity of the love you shared was remarkable, wasn't it? The bond felt unbreakable in that moment, as if nothing could ever diminish it or come between you. These experiences are a powerful foreshadowing of the new heaven and earth, where we will be reunited with God and freed from the presence of sin. It shifts our perspective on marriage from merely a source of personal happiness to a means of drawing ourselves and others closer to God.

All married couples aspire to achieve the ecstatic joy of a husband and wife united in enduring love and shared purpose. However, even the most joyful relationships on earth are merely faint reflections of the bliss to come between Christ and His followers. Recognizing this has led me to several important truths.

First, my wife is neither mine nor her own; she belongs to God, just as I do. I am journeying through life with her, and part of my role is to guide her towards Jesus Christ. Acknowledging this truth—that out of all the people God could have introduced into my wife's life, He chose me—instills me with a deep sense of purpose. I am a steward of someone extraordinary, a daughter of the King of Kings.

Second, our marriage serves as a beacon, directing people towards Christ. Many of us can think of a marriage we admire, drawn to it because we want something similar for ourselves. When we delve into what makes such a marriage admirable, asking meaningful questions that could enhance our relationships, we find that at the heart of these exemplary unions are qualities that reflect Christ Jesus. Attributes such as agape love, self-sacrifice, service, grace, and forgiveness are just a few traits that a husband and wife can display while guiding others to Jesus.

People look up to and seek out commendable marriages to uncover their secrets, only to realize that at the foundation of a strong marriage is always Jesus²⁵. This realization encourages me to love my wife even more, knowing that by doing so, God can use our marriage to lead others to Jesus. It is a beautiful reality that my efforts to invest in my wife help us and everyone we interact with.

Finally, as wonderful as my relationship with my wife is, it will be even better in heaven. Honestly, the absence of marriage in heaven always made me feel a twinge of sorrow. It was hard to imagine not being married to such a remarkable person. However, as I prayed about this, God showed me that heaven would perfect our relationship, not diminish it.

Our most significant relationships on earth will stay with us in heaven and be freed from sin. Just as Adam rejoiced over Eve in the Garden with longing and delight, so will we rejoice in being united with our believing loved ones in heaven. I often joke with my wife that I will be following her everywhere she goes.

Even our most intimate moments here on earth are tainted by sin. This affects our ability to connect with God and each other fully. When God reunites heaven and earth, the Bible tells us we will see Him face to face (Revelation 22:4). We will constantly experience God's manifest glory and presence. With no sin or impulse to sin, every desire will align with God's will. Every action will aim to glorify God in heaven as we live, love, move, breathe, build, create, learn, and explore. We will reign on the new earth (Revelation 21:1) in perfect partnership with our Creator God (Revelation 22:5).

My relationship with my wife may not look the same in heaven, but it certainly will not end or diminish. Like everything, God will make it perfect in heaven. Doubt, fear, worry, anxiety, or discomfort will be nonexistent. There will be pure, unadulterated love between us and nothing else. The intimacy we have experienced on earth will pale compared to the depth of experience awaiting us in heaven. Heaven will be astounding beyond what we can imagine.

CHRIST'S LOVE AS A MODEL FOR HUSBANDLY LOVE

Christ's enduring, self-sacrificial love is the supreme example for a husband to follow. Jesus sacrificed everything for us, His church. His sacrifice, as God, is beyond what we can fully understand or appreciate. We will explore this concept more thoroughly throughout the book.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

I have always been fascinated by the contrast between the reasons we personally enter into marriage and the reasons God created marriage. If we are honest, most of us step into marriage with the hope that the intoxicating feeling of love we have with our fiancé will never fade. Unless we have been jaded by too many bad experiences, we often begin marriage riding a wave of relational highs, unable to imagine that joyful momentum ever ending. That was certainly true for me.

But why did God design us this way? Why did He create us to focus so heavily—and often selfishly—on our own happiness and fulfillment as we approach marriage? Why not give us a clearer focus on the greater purposes of marriage from the beginning? While I cannot claim to have the definitive answer, I believe it lies in the central role of marital intimacy.

Intimacy between husband and wife is absolutely critical. It is the key to unlocking the complementary nature of male and female as God designed them, and projecting that unity into the world. It is the lens through which we come to understand the intimacy God desires with each of us and mirrors the love Jesus has for His church. It also serves as a foundational way to reflect God's love to our children.

When we see a strong and thriving marriage, what draws us in is the intimacy between the couple. It is attractive and inspiring because it invites us to wonder: What is it they have that I do not? This is where we find the answer to why God predisposed us to seek relational fulfillment. From the beginning of a relationship, He allows intimacy to take center stage—not because our pursuit of it is inherently selfless (though there is nothing wrong with desiring love)—but because intimacy is the foundation upon which so many greater purposes are built. God takes what begins as a self-focused pursuit and weaves it into a beautiful tapestry that reflects His Kingdom purposes.

By understanding these broader purposes of marriage, we begin to see how God uses it as a powerful tool to expand His Kingdom through us. This shift in perspective changes how we approach intimacy. We no longer pursue it merely for our own satisfaction but for something far greater. Instead, we seek intimacy with our spouse because we recognize its importance for them, for our family, and for everyone around us.

As the husband, God commissions you to lead your wife and family to fulfill these purposes. Why you? Because someone has to lead and God chose you! In the next chapter, let's explore how God wants to use you to be the driving force of a thriving marriage.

Chapter Four

The Design of Marriage

HAVE I NOT COMMANDED YOU? BE STRONG AND COURAGEOUS. DO NOT BE AFRAID; DO NOT BE DISCOURAGED, FOR THE LORD YOUR GOD WILL BE WITH YOU WHEREVER YOU GO. JOSHUA 1:9 NIV

Moses is a figure of immense influence in the world. His life and writings have shaped religious thought, legal systems, literature, and art over the millennia. His teachings have influenced the spiritual direction of billions of people. However, he was notably reluctant to embrace his role as a leader.

Today, many men are similarly hesitant to take on their God-given responsibility to lead their wives and children away from the bondage of worldly influences and toward a life filled with God's presence. Instead, they often abandon this significant and impactful duty to satisfy selfish desires, chase worldly achievements, remain in apathetic complacency, or linger in feelings of fear, bitterness, or inadequacy.

Why do we act this way as men? Why are so many ready to relinquish the conquering spirit that God placed within us, give up on greatness, and settle for a small, isolated life?

You might be thinking, "Wow, wait a second. I thought this chapter was about the design of marriage?" It certainly is. However, the pressing issue in my heart over the following few chapters is not only to explain how God designed marriage but also to help you understand the significance of your role. Just as Moses' calling resulted in greatness before the Lord, your marriage is key to achieving eternal significance.

Moses objected to God's charge when he was before Him at the burning bush, offering multiple reasons why he was not the right man for the job. Finally, he asked, "Please send someone else" (Exodus 4:13). The Bible does not explicitly say why Moses was reluctant to answer God's call to lead His people out of slavery and into the promised land. However, perhaps we can identify with him through a few reasons we might have used:

- **Complacency:** The most obvious guess is that Moses had become complacent with the status quo. At 80, he might not want to leave his comfortable new home in Midian. Although the Egyptians still enslaved the Israelites, he resigned himself to accepting the current reality, not believing that he could affect any change.
- **Feelings Against Israel:** Despite being Hebrew, the Israelites rejected Moses as their savior before he left Egypt (Exodus 2:14). Moses may have harbored resentment, sorrow, bitterness, or even anger toward the Israelites. He did not want to lead a people who had already rejected him.
- **Fear:** It is conceivable that the idea of returning to Egypt paralyzed Moses. He might have doubted whether God would or could do what He promised. The fear of returning to Egypt to fight for Israel only to fail might have led him to think it better not to try at all.
- **Inadequacy:** We know that Moses felt inadequate for the task. He scrutinized the role God was assigning him and concluded that he was not the right man. He doubted his ability to convince the people, let alone Pharaoh, to listen to him. Even with God's promise of support, Moses still lacked the confidence to start.
- **Overwhelmed:** Another possibility is that Moses was overwhelmed by the enormity of God's task. God asked him to leave his new home, return to a people who had rejected him, speak to a king who was likely to kill him, and lead a nation out of Egypt into a promised land. Transitioning from a humble shepherd to the leader of a nascent nation was daunting.

These reasons ultimately stem from a lack of faith in God. If Moses felt complacent, it indicated that he was not trusting that what God had planned for him was better

than his current situation. If he held negative feelings toward the Israelites, it showed a lack of trust in God's ability to heal what was broken and facilitate restoration. If he experienced fear, feelings of inadequacy, or was overwhelmed by the magnitude of what God had asked him to do, it meant he did not trust that God would fulfill His promises. Similarly, we, as men, can fall into these traps in our approach to marriage.

Take a moment for introspection. Is your marriage everything you want it to be? Perhaps it has always been adequate but not exceptional, leading you to become complacent with the thought, "That's just how it's always been." Do you believe that God can revitalize your marriage and reignite the passion that once existed between you and your wife?

Maybe your wife has deeply hurt you, resulting in resentment, bitterness, or distrust. Do you believe God can heal your bond and guide you into new seasons of joy and marital flourishing?

Perhaps you view the leadership responsibility God assigns to husbands as daunting, to the point where you hesitate even to try. Do you believe God can empower you for whatever work lies ahead and transform you into the legendary leader He calls you to be?

At this point, you may think that all of this is not that big of a deal. Everyone experiences marital problems, and they must learn to live with them. We must grit our teeth and get through it. This is the wrong perspective! You do not have to settle for a subpar marriage. Why would you settle when you can transform it into a powerhouse of purpose and happiness that God can use to help you and everyone around you?

Consider this your wake-up call because nothing that you do in life will compare to loving your wife well. As you consider God's design for marriage, I hope you realize how important you, the husband, are to this union crafted by God.

GOD'S DESIGN OF MARRIAGE

The Christian perspective on marriage is straightforward to understand, even if it is at odds with modern societal inclinations. Marriage, as designed by God, is a lifelong union of one man and one woman (Genesis 2:24). This has always been

God's definition of marriage, even during eras when humanity has deviated from it (Matthew 19:8). Humanity has experimented with various other formulations of relationships that are labeled as marriages but are, in fact, not valid marriages. Any deviation from God's design is not a marriage but a social union crafted by humanity. It is akin to buying a knock-off that is only a cheap imitation of the original. Let us explore the components of God's definition and how it applies to us.

LIFELONG UNION

The first attribute of God's design for marriage is that it is lifelong. As long as both partners are alive, they are to stay married. Divorce is a significant departure from this. Malachi reveals that marriage is not simply a loving commitment between two people but a covenant involving God, man, and woman.

AND THIS SECOND THING YOU DO. YOU COVER THE LORD'S ALTAR WITH TEARS, WITH WEEPING AND GROANING BECAUSE HE NO LONGER REGARDS THE OFFERING OR ACCEPTS IT WITH FAVOR FROM YOUR HAND. BUT YOU SAY, "WHY DOES HE NOT?" BECAUSE THE LORD WAS WITNESS BETWEEN YOU AND THE WIFE OF YOUR YOUTH, TO WHOM YOU HAVE BEEN FAITHLESS, THOUGH SHE IS YOUR COMPANION AND YOUR WIFE BY COVENANT. MALACHI 2:13-14 ESV

A covenant is a promissory agreement between at least two parties²⁶. While many people think of them merely as promises, it is more correct to consider them like contracts. Every covenant involves at least two parties and typically includes some requirements that each must fulfill to meet the terms of the agreement. There are many covenants throughout scripture, such as God's covenant with Noah, in which He promises never to flood the Earth again. Malachi equates marriage with a covenant agreement, implying that someone is overseeing your marriage and holding you accountable for how you fulfill the promises you have made to your wife.

Divorcing your wife is the ultimate violation of your covenant; however, it is not the only violation you can commit. Scripture shows that God's favor over your life as a man and husband partially depends on how you treat your wife. The Apostle Peter highlights this in a different light:

LIKEWISE, HUSBANDS, LIVE WITH YOUR WIVES IN AN UNDERSTANDING WAY, SHOWING HONOR TO THE WOMAN AS THE WEAKER VESSEL, SINCE THEY ARE HEIRS WITH YOU OF THE GRACE OF LIFE, SO THAT YOUR PRAYERS MAY NOT BE HINDERED. 1 PETER 3:7 ESV

This highlights that even simple disrespect or mistreatment of your wife can hinder your prayers before God. God views a man who mistreats his wife with disfavor. If you want your marriage to flourish throughout your life, it is crucial to understand that God sees and knows everything you do, even in secret. You may be able to hide certain activities or thoughts from your wife, but you cannot hide them from God. Favor from God, especially concerning your marriage, requires covenantal faithfulness.

I will be explicit. This means avoiding pornography, refraining from fantasizing about being with another woman, not flirting with or pursuing the opposite sex, not sharing intimate thoughts and details with women other than your wife, and abstaining from explicit cheating, whether with professionals offering sex or with potential new lovers. You promised to be faithful and to forsake all others in mind, body, and spirit. If you are experiencing serious troubles in your life, consider how you are treating and respecting the wife of your youth. Take it seriously because God sees everything you do.

Marital Unfaithfulness

Scripture allows for separation from your spouse in cases of marital unfaithfulness. Jesus Himself said, “*And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery*” (Matthew 19:9). I understand the challenge and deep pain of discovering that your wife has been unfaithful and physically involved with another man. But it is crucial to know that God has the power to heal and restore all things! Just because your wife has been unfaithful does not mean you must leave her or discard her. The forgiveness and mercy offered in such situations can forge an incredible bond and commitment.

Moreover, I would challenge you to examine your own heart. Have you been entirely faithful? Jesus taught that to look at another woman lustfully is to commit adultery (Matthew 5:28). One might argue that physical acts are different from mental ones, placing them on another level of betrayal. This is correct. Sexual sin

violates our nature, which includes the body as the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:18). Yet glory awaits the man ready to forgive his spouse (Proverbs 19:11). However, I realize how difficult this can be. My encouragement to you is this: forgive your wife, stay committed, and watch how God can redeem even the most difficult circumstances to bless His children.

Death

The other exception is the unfortunate passing of your spouse. Scripture allows for remarriage in such cases (1 Corinthians 7:39). My conviction is that I would not remarry, though I recognize that it will not be the correct answer for everyone. Reflecting on my life before marriage, I could not imagine living as a single person. Companionship, expressed intimately through spiritual and physical connections with my wife, is something I deeply desired. Indeed, God has blessed me with an excellent and intimate relationship. This has significantly altered my state compared to before I was married. God forbid, but if my wife were to pass away, I now cannot imagine ever forming such connections with anyone else. The joy and intimacy I have experienced with her make the thought of sharing that with another person unfathomable.

This feeling is not merely due to my current happiness but because my eyes are fixed on eternity. I look forward to being in heaven alongside my greatest earthly love and friend. I do not want or need those memories with anyone else. Having enjoyed the fruits of this union, if I were to walk a season without her, my focus would shift to how I might serve God in other unique ways.

This is my conviction on the matter, and that is the point. Whether or not to remarry is between an individual man and the Lord. Each man should follow his conviction—recognizing that while God permits remarriage, it may not be the wisest or most appropriate choice for everyone. There may be good reasons to stay single and enter a new era of life, free from the blessings and entanglements of domestic affairs. Pray about it adamantly and follow what God tells you to do.

What constitutes marriage?

This leads us to a significant question: when are two people considered married by God? We can find the answer in the fact that marriage is a covenantal agreement.

A covenant in ancient Hebrew culture was a sacred and binding agreement. Each covenant followed a structured pattern, involving specific components. Components of a covenant typically included:

1. **Mutual Agreement Between Parties:** A covenant requires the voluntary consent and agreement of both parties. For example, God and Abraham's covenant involved Abraham's commitment to circumcision as a sign of faith and obedience, while God promised to bless him and make him the father of many nations (Genesis 17:7).
2. **Oaths or Vows:** Covenants are formalized through solemn oaths or vows. For example, the Israelites swore an oath to follow the Law as part of their covenant with God: "All that the Lord has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient" (Exodus 24:7).
3. **Witnesses to the Covenant:** God or human witnesses validate the covenant and hold the parties accountable. Objects or memorials could also serve as witnesses. For example, Jacob and Laban set up a heap of stones as a witness to their agreement: "This heap is a witness, and the pillar is a witness, that I will not pass over this heap to you, and you will not pass over this heap and this pillar to me, to do harm" (Genesis 31:48-49).
4. **A Covenant Sign or Symbol:** Covenants often include a visible sign to serve as a lasting reminder of the agreement. For example, the rainbow was a sign of God's covenant with Noah: "This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: I have set my bow in the cloud" (Genesis 9:12-13). Circumcision served as the sign of the Abrahamic covenant (Genesis 17:10-11).
5. **A Meal or Fellowship:** Some covenants are accompanied by a shared meal or celebration, symbolizing fellowship and unity between the parties. For example, after confirming the Mosaic covenant, the elders of Israel ate and drank in God's presence on Mount Sinai: "They beheld God, and ate and drank" (Exodus 24:11).

In the covenant of marriage, scripture does not provide exact instructions. Nowhere in the Bible is there a description of what official acts must be taken to enter a

marriage. If marriage is a covenant, however, than the components of a covenant should be acted out to marry two individuals.

I will be clear by saying that if you live or sleep together with a woman, then you should take immediate steps to enter the covenant of marriage or take a step back from the relationship. You are participating in actions of the mind, body, and soul that are difficult to repair. You are playing with fire intended for the powerful confines of marriage.

If you decide that you should leave the relationship instead of marrying, I caution you to take heed of what God thinks about this step. If separation from your girlfriend would cause her emotional or circumstantial damage, then I believe God will hold you to account for causing her pain and suffering. She is His child and He is her dad! You can take it from a dad of three girls that the ultimate Father will protect His daughter!

If you are a man in a situation like this, do not take comfort in the misconception that a ceremony is necessary to validate your bond. If you have intertwined your life with a woman emotionally, financially, and physically, then you are bound to her. You owe her your commitment and support, and you should pursue an official marital ceremony. If she is not ready for that, take a step back and consider whether you should continue engaging in practices with her that are intended for marriage. There is a reason God designed these experiences to be unique to marriage: the lifelong, covenantal bond of marriage is strong enough to support them when taken seriously. Otherwise, you risk significant harm to both you and your partner.

ONE MAN AND ONE WOMAN

The second attribute of God's design for marriage is the complementary relationship between one man and one woman. Society often overlooks the specific number of participants in our modern debates about marriage, but it is just as crucial as the binary relationship between man and woman. Indeed, more fringe articles are appearing in my news feeds related to emerging constructs of "marriage." Even if unrecognized by law, some individuals participate in unions involving multiple people. This is a terrible idea, both for the individual participants and for the broader society.

First, this practice undermines God's intentions for marriage. As discussed in earlier

chapters, the purposes of marriage are not supported by unions involving multiple partners. The natural strength of the complementary relationship between a man and a woman deteriorates when the balance between genders is disrupted. Instead of a man working to grow God's Kingdom in partnership with one woman, he becomes distracted by managing or satisfying multiple women who may compete with each other and their husband. In such circumstances, the sanctification of individuals becomes impossible, as participants are committed to an ungodly union and often focus on trivial and earthly disputes.

Furthermore, and perhaps most critically, this practice corrupts the image of how Christ loves His bride, the Church. Christ's love is exclusive; He does not have multiple brides. The practice of marrying numerous people diminishes the beautiful imagery of His exclusive love for His Church. This deviation disrupts the divine blueprint for marriage and distorts the spiritual symbolism it is meant to represent.

Another concern is that marital relationships involving more than two people often lead to familial chaos. The individual relationships within these arrangements become strained and competitive, sometimes leading to hatred. Every example of polygyny in Scripture results in dire consequences:

- Abraham's decision to marry Hagar, Sarah's maidservant, led to strained relations among all three individuals and ultimately to the banishment of Hagar and Ishmael, Abraham's firstborn son.
- Jacob's choice to marry both Leah and Rachel, along with their maidservants Zilpah and Bilhah, resulted in intense family competition, favoritism, and even the disturbing incident of Jacob's son Reuben having sexual relations with Bilhah.
- Elkanah's marriage to Hannah and Peninnah created a rivalry between his wives because Peninnah felt loved less than Hannah.
- David's multiple marriages caused significant family strife, leading to the murder of his eldest son Amnon and sparking Israel's first civil war between David and his son Absalom.
- Solomon's numerous wives led him away from God and caused Israel to stray towards false gods.

These examples illustrate that the Bible portrays relationships involving multiple partners as fundamentally flawed, leading to severe consequences. God intended the marriage union to be a binary relationship between one man and one woman.

Consider the purpose and design of gender. God intended for gender to be the means through which His image is fully represented in this world. His defining characteristics are manifested on earth when man and woman partner together. The full expression of God's image cannot be achieved with either man or woman alone. Marriage then is intended as the unbreakable bond that unites man and woman to work together lovingly and harmoniously, fulfilling God's mandate to exercise dominion over the earth. This cannot be accomplished through other combinations.

A union of two men or two women does not manifest the complete image of God. Remember that men and women are incredibly different. No matter how feminine a man may appear, he cannot manifest femininity because his inherent nature is male. Similarly, no matter how masculine a woman may behave, she cannot fully manifest manhood because her essence is female. This is God-ordained and designed. We cannot change what He declares.

If we cannot alter our essential gender, then same-sex unions cannot fully represent God's image. I do not believe we can define these unions as marriage because God designed the institution of marriage. We can no more change this design than we can alter our essential nature. He is God; we are not. Same-sex unions are an attempt to redefine God's function and design for marriage, akin to taking the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, where what is considered good may be redefined.

MARITAL GOVERNANCE

Headship

Like any foundational societal institution, marriage requires good governance. The roles, responsibilities, and decisions executed by members of an institution must be clearly understood to ensure order rather than chaos. Without marital governance, what results is a disordered mess oriented towards the selfish whims of its members, who are vying for dominance. This is not marriage. Marriage needs a leader who is responsible for making decisions and progressing the relationship towards its

purpose. That leader is you: the man. Consider what Paul says very clearly to the church in Corinth:

BUT I WANT YOU TO UNDERSTAND THAT THE HEAD OF EVERY MAN IS CHRIST, THE HEAD OF A WIFE IS HER HUSBAND, AND THE HEAD OF CHRIST IS GOD. 1 CORINTHIANS 11:3 ESV

A husband is the “head” of his wife. This passage implies leadership and authority passing from Christ to man to wife. But what exactly is headship? Headship certainly implies authority, but how the authority is used is crucial.

Many have been placed in leadership roles and positions, but how they lead makes all the difference. Husbands are given authority over their wives to lead in a specific way conducive to marital and familial flourishing, and deviating from this way forfeits their role as leaders.

I'll repeat it plainly: If your leadership in marriage does not reflect the example of Jesus, you abandon the God-given honor of being its head. In that moment, Christ does not relinquish His care for your wife—He reasserts His own leadership over her, because He never ceases to be her ultimate Shepherd. When a husband walks away from the call to lead like Christ, he is not leading at all. He is standing in the place of headship but leaving it vacant, and Christ will fill what man fails to fulfill. How are husbands supposed to lead?

Husbands are to lead like Jesus, making marital leadership far more about responsibility and accountability than authority (Ephesians 5:25). Jesus led as a servant. His leadership was characterized primarily by spiritual stewardship, self-sacrifice, and covering, which included providing provision and protection. Servant leadership is not about the traditional notion of “who wears the pants.” It is a higher calling to love your wife as Jesus loves, sacrifices for, and provides for His bride—the church.

Submission

Scripture instructs wives to submit to their husbands, implying that they are designed to thrive in supporting and following their husbands' leadership (Ephesians 5:22, 1 Peter 3:1). It is important we do not shy away from this biblical position because doing so ruins the reflection of Christ's relationship with His bride, the Church.

In the book *Happily Ever After*, Kim Cash Tate highlights that submission in marriage serves a far greater purpose than merely maintaining order within the home²⁷. It points to the supremacy of Christ. She writes, “*Submission in marriage bears witness to our risen Lord who reigns supreme.*” According to Tate, when a wife willingly submits to her husband, she reflects the church’s submission to Christ and God’s divine order. But when submission is dismissed or ignored, she warns, it “*dulls the reflection*” of Christ’s authority, diminishing the powerful testimony marriage is meant to display to the world. For this reason alone, we should preserve submission as something we preach and practice. Submission does not diminish a wife’s value or capability but emphasizes a harmonious and complementary partnership designed by God to reflect Christ and His Church.

Submission in the context of marriage involves multiple aspects, including recognizing and respecting the husband as God’s appointed leader in the home while contributing wisdom to enhance his decision-making; supporting and encouraging the husband in his efforts to lead spiritually; imitating the husband’s example of self-sacrificial love, especially towards her children; and gently correcting and inspiring the husband to a higher standard of morality. As John Piper points out, submission never requires a wife to silence her convictions or abandon her responsibility to influence her husband for good²⁸. Rather, she brings her wisdom and discernment to bear, seeking to strengthen her husband’s leadership, not override it. Notice that this does not diminish the woman in any way. Instead, it invites a wife to use her uniquely powerful feminine abilities to support, encourage, and help sanctify her husband—lifting them both to greater heights with God.

The Burden and Joy of Leadership

It is a regrettable reality that many men, upon learning of their leadership duties under God, shy away from them, often passing these responsibilities onto their wives, sometimes even under the guise of “feminine equality.” At the beginning of this chapter, I discussed Moses and his reluctance to lead Israel into the promised land. Similar fears and reasons why men today do not lead in their marriages are common. Factors such as complacency with the status quo, anger and bitterness, fear of rejection, feelings of personal inadequacy, and feeling overwhelmed by the role are reasons a husband might abandon his leadership duties and allow his wife to

lead. However, God did not design women to fill this role. Indeed, wives typically do not want it and show disdain for their husbands when they abdicate responsibility. In marriage, men are designed for headship and women for submission.

Do not be afraid of leading because the happiest men in the world embrace God's definitions of greatness and leadership. Their wives not only enthusiastically follow them but also adore them and bestow such blessings upon them that their husbands can never fully reciprocate. Trust me when I say that nothing compares to the praise and admiration of your wife. I cherish the moments when my wife looks at me with genuine pride. It fills me with joy beyond measure.

TRUSTING GOD'S DESIGN

How do we know God's design is best? Because He made it. Accepting His design for marriage as the best construct for human and societal flourishing is a matter of faith. God alone is in a position of wisdom and power sufficient to understand the best design for marriage. We are called to trust Him and follow His design, to which I can attest is more beautiful than I could have imagined.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Marriage is far more wonderful than we realize when we first pursue it. Initially, we may seek companionship, but God guides us into a masterfully designed institution that He has harnessed for our benefit and His glory. The best part is that you get to play a vital role.

God designed you to lead your wife. This means encouraging her to draw closer to Him by your example, being the first mover in all areas, and laying your life down in sacrificial service. I understand if you thought entering marriage was an exercise of mutual benefits shared between partners. This is the fruit of marriage, but the purposes are so much more meaningful than what you get. I encourage you to be unconcerned about what you are getting from your wife. Instead, be a leader, like Jesus, and let go of your selfish desires. You now know, marriage is far greater than your simple wants. Step up and lead.

Perhaps an excuse is getting in your way? You can overcome it through Christ who gives you strength (Philippians 4:13). He helps us to stop fussing over ourselves

and focus on Kingdom purpose. Just as Moses overcame every one of his obstacles and became one of the most outstanding leaders in history, you can also overcome and leave behind an eternally significant legacy of greatness. Your eternal legacy is what we will cover next.

Chapter Five

Greatness and Marriage

BUT THE LORD SAID TO SAMUEL, "DO NOT LOOK ON HIS APPEARANCE OR ON THE HEIGHT OF HIS STATURE, BECAUSE I HAVE REJECTED HIM. FOR THE LORD SEES NOT AS MAN SEES: MAN LOOKS ON THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE, BUT THE LORD LOOKS ON THE HEART."

1 SAMUEL 16:7 NIV

Once upon a time, a man renowned for his unmatched wisdom lived in a distant land. His understanding was so vast that no one before or since has equaled him. He was a king whose power was unrivaled, making it impossible for any nation to challenge his might. His wealth was so abundant that gold filled his treasury, and silver was considered of little value—so ordinary it was scarcely noticed. His fame spread far and wide, drawing rulers from every corner of the earth to seek his counsel. He also had countless wives and concubines—so many that he could sleep with a different woman every day for a year and still not exhaust them all. By every worldly standard, this man had everything society tells us men should desire: unparalleled talent, immense power, extraordinary wealth, widespread fame, and limitless pleasure. He embodied the ultimate vision of success, the perfect formula for a life of satisfaction.

This man, of course, was King Solomon, the son of David, who reigned over Israel. From a worldly perspective, Solomon had it all. No one could oppose him in battle, outspend his wealth, or surpass his wisdom. He was the quintessential "man among men."

Yet, in the final assessment of his life, Scripture tells us that God was angry with Solomon (1 Kings 11:9). How did this happen? Solomon began his reign with such promise. He loved the Lord and walked in His ways (1 Kings 3:3). In a moment of profound humility, Solomon asked God for wisdom to lead the nation of Israel, acknowledging that the task was far too great for him alone (1 Kings 3:9).

God was pleased with this request and blessed Solomon abundantly. He granted him unparalleled wisdom and promised wealth, honor, and greatness. Under God's hand, Solomon became the greatest king ever to walk the earth. Yet, despite this extraordinary blessing, Solomon's life ended in spiritual failure. He abandoned God and became small in the Lord's eyes.

What caused this downfall? Was his greatness to blame? I do not think so. Greatness itself was never the problem. The issue was whom Solomon chose to worship, and that choice became his ultimate undoing.

WHAT IS GREATNESS?

I have always been fascinated by the concept of greatness. I do not want to be ordinary and believe no one should aspire to be. I would argue that God desires us to strive for greatness rather than mediocrity. In the parable of the talents, Jesus demonstrates how God praises and rewards His faithful servants who actively work to grow and invest what they have been given (Matthew 25:14-30). Moreover, when two of His disciples asked Him for places of honor, Jesus did not rebuke them for their desire for greatness. It was the other disciples who became upset with this request, prompting Jesus to take the opportunity to clarify what true greatness is.

BUT JESUS CALLED THEM TO HIM AND SAID, "YOU KNOW THAT THE RULERS OF THE GENTILES LORD IT OVER THEM, AND THEIR GREAT ONES EXERCISE AUTHORITY OVER THEM. IT SHALL NOT BE SO AMONG YOU. BUT WHOEVER WOULD BE GREAT AMONG YOU MUST BE YOUR SERVANT,." MATTHEW 20:25-26 ESV

While this is not the definition that would come naturally to most, Jesus points out service as the way to become great. We naturally think about influence, fortune, or position as things that define greatness. But instead, Jesus defines service as

greatness. In another situation, Jesus' disciples ask Him directly who is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven. Jesus replies:

AND CALLING TO HIM A CHILD, HE PUT HIM IN THE MIDST OF THEM AND SAID, "TRULY, I SAY TO YOU, UNLESS YOU TURN AND BECOME LIKE CHILDREN, YOU WILL NEVER ENTER THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN. WHOEVER HUMBLING HIMSELF LIKE THIS CHILD IS THE GREATEST IN THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN. MATTHEW 18:2-4 ESV

Children are impressionable, eager to learn, and open to the guidance of those in authority over them. They are filled with questions and a natural curiosity about the world. Jesus tells us that to be great, we must adopt this same teachable spirit—open to what God is doing in and through us.

But Jesus was also sending another message. Children do not often seek the prizes of this world. Instead, they seek the approval and acceptance of their parents, authorities, and peers. Worldly things pursued by adults are not even on their radar because they are consumed with getting good grades or having the next fun experience. They are unsure why they should care about such things, but they trust those leading them to have their best interests at heart.

This does not mean we should reject wealth, power, or influence outright—these can be valuable tools for advancing God's Kingdom. However, they must never become our ultimate purpose. They cannot be ends in themselves. True greatness is found in humbly surrendering to God, and valuing Him above all else. We must see Him as our ultimate prize, not the things of this world.

Paul echoes this sentiment when he writes to the church in Rome:

SO DON'T YOU SEE THAT WE DON'T OWE THIS OLD DO-IT-YOURSELF LIFE ONE RED CENT. THERE'S NOTHING IN IT FOR US, NOTHING AT ALL. THE BEST THING TO DO IS GIVE IT A DECENT BURIAL AND GET ON WITH YOUR NEW LIFE. GOD'S SPIRIT BECKONS. THERE ARE THINGS TO DO AND PLACES TO GO! THIS RESURRECTION LIFE YOU RECEIVED FROM GOD IS NOT A TIMID, GRAVE-TENDING LIFE. IT'S ADVENTUROUSLY EXPECTANT, GREETING GOD WITH A CHILDLIKE "WHAT'S NEXT, PAPA?"

GOD'S SPIRIT TOUCHES OUR SPIRITS AND CONFIRMS WHO WE REALLY ARE. WE KNOW WHO HE IS, AND WE KNOW WHO WE ARE: FATHER AND CHILDREN. AND WE KNOW WE ARE GOING TO GET WHAT'S COMING TO US—AN UNBELIEVABLE INHERITANCE! WE GO THROUGH EXACTLY WHAT CHRIST GOES THROUGH. IF WE GO THROUGH THE HARD TIMES WITH HIM, THEN WE'RE CERTAINLY GOING TO GO THROUGH THE GOOD TIMES WITH HIM! ROMANS 8:12-17 MSG

Like a child asking, 'What's next, Papa?', our hearts must take on that same posture to reach greatness. When we adopt this posture, we become much less concerned with what we are getting and more concerned with drawing near to God so that He might work in and through us. It helps us stop thinking about ourselves. Perfect humility before God results in caring for the things He cares about. What does God care about?

FOR GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD, THAT HE GAVE HIS ONLY SON, THAT WHOEVER BELIEVES IN HIM SHOULD NOT PERISH BUT HAVE ETERNAL LIFE. JOHN 3:16 ESV

God cares about us. He loves us enough to come down in human form, humbling Himself so that we might receive eternal life. In the same way, we need the heart of Christ, who gave up His life every day to serve those around Him.

MISPLACED FOCUS

I used to believe that to be great, I needed power, wealth, or influence to have an impact in God's Kingdom. I did not have a clear plan for how this would happen, but I filled my mind with grand fantasies. I imagined myself speaking to massive crowds, playing music in stadiums packed with thousands, and being a leader that people admired and sought out for advice and counsel.

Convinced I was pursuing this kind of greatness for God's glory, my dreams of greatness were more about exalting my name. The problem was not necessarily that I wanted greatness but how I defined it and who I truly worshiped. I mistook the resources God provides—like influence and talent—as measures of greatness, and I looked to glorify myself by pursuing them. This misguided pursuit came to a head in my marriage, especially regarding serving in church²⁹.

Church ministry was attractive to me, not because of pure devotion to God but because it offered a way to gain influence and build what I imagined was a “Kingdom legacy.” I wanted to be increasingly involved, but my wife often expressed valid concerns, which I perceived as her trying to “hold me back.” Those were not her words—they were my own, another self-serving lie I used to justify my frustration.

My thinking was completely backward. I thought I was taking steps toward greatness when I was moving further away from it. I had the right idea about ministry being an avenue for service and greatness, but the object of my service was all wrong. At best, I was serving my brothers and sisters in the church—but even that was not my primary focus. Often, the actual object of my service was myself. I craved recognition and influence and saw the church as a stage to achieve these things.

Through all of this, I was neglecting the most important person God had placed in my life—my wife—ironically, the one most able to help me discover authentic greatness.

PROXIMITY MATTERS

Proximity is central to the focus of our service and ministry. There are no accidents; random chance does not influence where or when we find ourselves in history. Everything is predestined and perfectly aligned with God’s sovereign plan (Ephesians 1:3-5). This means that God has chosen this specific moment for me to live out my days out of every possible time and place.

The mind of God has always been astounding to me. In His infinite knowledge, He looked at my life and preordained that 1985 in the DC Metro area would be the best time and place for my existence. He considered every free choice and environmental influence I would experience and wove it into His perfect plan. This means my life has unique purposes that no one else can fulfill.

When I began to grasp this truth, I realized something humbling: the greatness I had been chasing was not unique. The roles I idolized—teacher, preacher, worship leader, businessman, academic—could all be filled by countless others God could raise for those purposes. But there is one role that is uniquely mine. Out of all the people who have ever existed, I am the one God entrusted with His beautiful daughter, my wife.

Proximity matters because God's sovereign plan is unfolding right where we are. Greatness is not defined by wealth, fame, or power. It is tied to how faithfully we fulfill the specific purpose God has entrusted to us. No one else in the entire universe can live out your purpose. I was once skeptical of this truth. Whenever a pastor would preach about having a "unique purpose," I had to resist the urge to roll my eyes. I thought God had one overarching sovereign purpose and that while I could contribute to it if I wanted, my small, mundane life did not matter much in the grand scheme.

In one sense, I was partially correct. God's sovereign will is unstoppable—it will be carried out with or without me. But I was wrong to diminish the unique role He has given me. Who am I to declare myself insignificant? If God teaches me that greatness is found in serving those around me—especially those closest to me—then who am I to say otherwise?

TRUE GREATNESS

We need to change how we measure greatness. Wealth, fame, power, and pleasure are not the markers of success. God's approval is. Jesus teaches us to seek heavenly treasures that will never fade:

DO NOT LAY UP FOR YOURSELVES TREASURES ON EARTH, WHERE MOTH AND RUST DESTROY AND WHERE THIEVES BREAK IN AND STEAL, BUT LAY UP FOR YOURSELVES TREASURES IN HEAVEN, WHERE NEITHER MOTH NOR RUST DESTROYS AND WHERE THIEVES DO NOT BREAK IN AND STEAL. FOR WHERE YOUR TREASURE IS, THERE YOUR HEART WILL BE ALSO. MATTHEW 6:19-21 ESV

Jesus tells us that where our treasure is, there will also be our hearts. This means that our thoughts, passions, and pursuits will be consumed with whatever we consider our ultimate treasure. If our treasure is rooted in the things of this world, that is what we will chase—neglecting the eternal treasure found in God. So, what is this treasure? God's approval.

"HIS MASTER SAID TO HIM, 'WELL DONE, GOOD AND FAITHFUL SERVANT. YOU HAVE BEEN FAITHFUL OVER A LITTLE; I WILL SET YOU OVER MUCH. ENTER INTO THE JOY OF YOUR MASTER.' AND HE ALSO

WHO HAD THE TWO TALENTS CAME FORWARD, SAYING, 'MASTER, YOU DELIVERED TO ME TWO TALENTS; HERE, I HAVE MADE TWO TALENTS MORE.' HIS MASTER SAID TO HIM, 'WELL DONE, GOOD AND FAITHFUL SERVANT. YOU HAVE BEEN FAITHFUL OVER A LITTLE; I WILL SET YOU OVER MUCH. ENTER INTO THE JOY OF YOUR MASTER.'" MATTHEW 25:21-23, ESV

Just as the faithful servants in Jesus' parable longed to hear these words, we too want to stand before God and hear, "Well done, good and faithful servant." If this is the treasure we seek, true greatness is ours. But even more, this treasure brings lasting satisfaction and peace in our work for His Kingdom, no matter how small it may seem in our eyes.

In the parable, both the servant with five talents and the servant with two talents receive the same reward of affirmation from their master. It did not matter that one had more to work with—that their ministry was more extensive, that they gave away more money, or that they saved more people. What mattered was their faithfulness to do what the master called them to do with what he entrusted them. If you're a Middle-earth fan, Gandalf's words may come to mind: "*All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given us.*"³⁰

In the same way, we are to invest what God has given us—our time, talents, and resources—into the lives of those around us. This is how we achieve true greatness: by faithfully stewarding what the Master has placed in our hands and using it for His glory.

GREATNESS AND MARRIAGE

As you read this chapter, you may be asking yourself, "What does all this have to do with marriage?" The answer is: it has everything to do with marriage! Your legacy and impact in this world begin with the wife God brought into your life. Don't think you can achieve greatness without her. Anything you accomplish will be significantly diminished if you do not steward well what God has given you. You can be great—God wants you to be great—and your marriage is your path to that greatness. No one else on earth can fulfill this unique calling in your life. Discard the world's standards of success and embrace God's affirmation.

True greatness is laying our lives down to serve those around us, starting with those closest to us. For a man, the moment you commit yourself to love a woman, she becomes the most important mission field you will ever have. The service, priority, and love you give her should be embarrassing compared to how you love anyone else. In his letter to the church in Ephesus, Paul says:

HUSBANDS, LOVE YOUR WIVES, AS CHRIST LOVED THE CHURCH AND GAVE HIMSELF UP FOR HER. EPHESIANS 5:25 ESV

Jesus is our example. How did Jesus love the church? With everything. He poured out everything in his ministry, emptying Himself daily to care for those around Him. Even when He was tired, His compassion for others led Him to minister to them (Mark 6:30-34). He gave His life on the cross and continues to serve us today, interceding for us before the Father (Romans 8:34). Jesus loved radically and fiercely, and so should we.

We can talk about another man who loved his wife well a long time ago. The Bible does not attribute any unique talents or treasures to his name. He had no real power or authority; his only title was a carpenter. Yet, the Church remembers him as one of the most outstanding men ever.

I am speaking of the earthly father of Jesus, Joseph. To understand Joseph's sacrifices, we must port ourselves into the mind of a first-century Jewish man. Mary and Joseph lived in Palestine during a time of Roman occupation. The Jews were a deeply communal society, which means falling out of it held real risks. Men or women who violated the religious and social norms of the time could be ostracized from their community and even close family. They could be denied participation in synagogues or other religious feasts and rituals. Their business or livelihood could be boycotted because of the stigma surrounding their sin. In short, Joseph faced severe and potentially lifelong consequences for staying with Mary once he found out she was pregnant.

I want you, for a moment, to put yourself in his shoes. Imagine discovering that your betrothed was pregnant and not by you. Imagine how hurt and betrayed you would feel, how damaged your pride would be, and how fearful you would be of others finding out. For a significant amount of time, I am sure Joseph was a wreck

of a man. He thought the beautiful young woman he was hoping to wed offered her body to another man. What would you have done in his shoes? Most men would be sad, angry, or even vengeful. The most natural reaction to hearing another man had sexual relations with your wife is rage (Proverbs 6:34). Most of us would have at once condemned Mary before the whole community and distanced ourselves from her as quickly as possible.

God certainly chose His man well. Joseph does not take revenge and decides to divorce Mary quietly. This is a kindness to Mary because he handled the matter as discreetly as possible, showing profound compassion. He cares for Mary even after he thinks she betrayed him. This carried risk for Joseph, too, because people might think he had sexual relations with Mary before marriage or that he was covering up for Mary.

Later, Joseph receives a visit in a dream. It must have been an extraordinary dream to leave such an impression because most dreams are hardly reliable guides for decision-making. Think about it momentarily: Joseph decided to stay with Mary based solely on a dream. That is an astounding demonstration of faith in God.

By choosing to stay with Mary, Joseph guaranteed that his life would carry a measure of social stigma. People would whisper and judge, assuming the worst about their situation. Of course, we know that God had a plan to protect and provide for Joseph and Mary, but they did not have that knowledge as they lived through it. Instead, they leaned into the purpose God had set before them, trusting Him completely.

From an earthly perspective, Joseph was not famous, wealthy, or influential. We know little about his skills or intellect outside of his work as a carpenter. He had one wife, remained faithful to her, and lived a righteous life. By worldly standards, he appears utterly insignificant.

Yet Joseph's willingness to lay down his life in humble service to those closest to him marked him as a great man in God's Kingdom. Because of his faith and obedience, he was given the incredible privilege of being Jesus' earthly father. Imagine the honor: God in human flesh walking, learning, and growing in a carpenter's home.

Even more, the Church forever remembers Joseph's faithfulness. Through Scripture,

we reflect on his life and honor his role in God's redemptive plan. Though quiet and unassuming, his greatness will be celebrated for all eternity.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Growing up, I marveled at how God blessed Israel under Solomon's rule. I saw it as a shining example of success. But I did not recognize that what appeared to be a list of significant accomplishments was, in reality, a slow drift away from God's commands.

Solomon had wisdom, knowledge, power, wealth, fame, and influence beyond anything we could imagine today. Yet the very things our culture associates with success and greatness led to Solomon's downfall. Ultimately, his life is remembered as a spiritual disaster before the Lord.

However, Solomon may have returned to God at the end of his life. The author of Ecclesiastes concludes with these words:

**THE END OF THE MATTER; ALL HAS BEEN HEARD. FEAR GOD AND
KEEP HIS COMMANDMENTS, FOR THIS IS THE WHOLE DUTY OF MAN.
ECCLESIASTES 12:13 ESV**

If Solomon is the author of Ecclesiastes (and I believe he is), then he speaks with unique authority on what truly matters in life. Having experienced everything the world offers, Solomon teaches us that all earthly pursuits are meaningless unless rooted in God. His message is clear: live as God defines, and you will have achieved true greatness. Solomon's life serves as a sobering warning. Outward success—no matter how impressive—does not guarantee that things are right between us and the Lord.

In contrast, Joseph stands as an example of true greatness. Despite his lack of wealth, fame, or influence—things our culture associates with importance—Joseph achieved greatness as God defines it. His character and actions reveal a man of deep faith and humility. God chose him to play a critical role in the most remarkable story ever told, as the earthly father of Jesus.

When we compare these two men—Solomon, the king who had everything the world

had to offer and led Israel to unmatched prosperity, and Joseph, a humble carpenter who loved his wife and family well—Solomon’s “greatness” pales in comparison.

So, how do you respond to God’s call to love your wife well? Where do you find the strength and resolve to persevere, especially when it’s difficult? The answer is found in daily fellowship with the Lord. As you walk closely with Him, you’ll be filled with His Spirit—empowered to lead and strengthened to love as Jesus loved. We’ll explore this more deeply in the next chapter.

Chapter Six

Connecting to the Source of Love

How do you draw closer to God so that He will empower you to love your wife well? The short answer is surrender. As you pursue God through spiritual disciplines, He will use them to deepen your faith and dependence on Him. While you have heard of these practices before, you may not have realized how vital they are—to your walk with God and your marriage.

This is not about earning God's love or approval. God already loves you unconditionally and is always nearby. If you have ever felt far from His love, the hard truth is that the distance lies with you, not Him. God is always walking beside you, waiting for you to invite Him to lead and guide your life. Your free will allows you to ignore His promptings. Tapping into His love—so that you can pour it out into your marriage—is entirely your decision. God is ready and willing to equip you for what He created you to do. The spiritual disciplines we will discuss are not for God's benefit but for yours.

There is a common misconception that these practices are burdensome. But if you ask anyone who engages in them, they will tell you how life-giving and transformative they are. These disciplines are how you draw closer to God and invite Him to give you everything you need to love your wife well.

It is important to remember that God is the ultimate prize. He created you to worship Him and share a loving relationship with Him. Those who pursue these practices often experience immense joy, satisfaction, and renewal. They are not a burden—they are a profound blessing.

READING SCRIPTURE

If there is one spiritual practice you should commit to regularly, let it be reading the Bible. The value of scripture daily cannot be overstated. To be filled with God's love and power, you must first know who He is. To know God, you must learn about Him; to learn about Him, you must read the words He has given us.

Think back to when you first met your wife. You pursued a relationship with her by asking countless questions to understand who she is and where she comes from. You need to ask those same questions about God because He is someone—not something. The Bible is the culmination of God's special revelation of Himself. It is God revealing God through the words of man. To know Him, you must read His collection of books. But it does not stop there. The Bible is unique not just because we read it—it also reads us.

FOR THE WORD OF GOD IS LIVING AND ACTIVE, SHARPER THAN ANY TWO-EDGED SWORD, PIERCING TO THE DIVISION OF SOUL AND OF SPIRIT, OF JOINTS AND OF MARROW, AND DISCERNING THE THOUGHTS AND INTENTIONS OF THE HEART. HEBREWS 4:12, ESV

The Bible is alive, and as you read it, it works within you. When you accepted Christ, you received the Holy Spirit—God Himself dwelling within you—who helps lead you into all truth (John 14:26). When you read scripture, you invite God to speak to you through His Word. Over the years, I have been amazed at how God has used scripture to speak directly into my life. Specific passages or truths resonate deeply, even if I have read them countless times before. God uses His Word to guide us uniquely through each season because He loves us.

Maybe you have wanted to start reading the Bible but have not been able to set up a rhythm, or you are unsure where to begin. Let me tell you: the devil will do everything in his power to convince you that you either do not have the time to read scripture or that you are incapable of understanding it. Do not believe the lie! You do have the time, and you can understand scripture. God will see to it that you do. Remember, He is within you, encouraging you to pursue Him and helping you know His Word.

While pastors are an incredible resource for understanding and applying biblical truth, the responsibility for your personal spiritual growth is yours. You must take ownership of it.

The best way to start is with a plan. While it is edifying to read the entire Bible eventually, I recommend beginning with the New Testament. Start at the beginning and read straight through to the end. Since the Bible is about God, and Jesus is the cornerstone of our faith, this is the most logical place to start. Use resources like commentaries and overviews to enhance your understanding as you read. The Bible Project offers excellent tools for contextualizing scripture and making sense of its teachings³¹. After finishing the New Testament, dive into the Old Testament and read it from beginning to end. Understanding the context of your reading is vital for grasping God's message to humanity.

While understanding scripture is crucial, its daily inspiration is just as valuable. God wants to speak to your heart as you read, build your faith, and guide you moment by moment. When I experience emotional turmoil, one of my first steps is opening Scripture and reading. My knowledge of the Bible often leads me to specific passages related to my struggle, but just as frequently, God surprises me by showing me new ways His Word applies to my situation.

The bottom line is that God uses His holy Word to fill us with His love by teaching us His truth. Consistent, daily reading will expand your ability to share God's love with your spouse. This is about allowing God's truth to pour into your heart so His love overflows through you to your wife.

PRAYER - FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD

If you take one thing away from this chapter about prayer, let it be this: prayer is fellowship with God. It is not an ethereal or mysterious activity requiring secret formulas for success. Structured prayer methods can be helpful, but run in the other direction if someone claims a hidden key to "make prayer work" or manipulates God into giving you what you want. Prayer is powerful not because of any specific technique but because of the One we are communing with.

That is not to say methods of prayer are wrong or unhelpful. Many systems of prayer

have drawn countless people closer to God. But no technique guarantees human desired, results or ensures you will “get” something from God. Approaching prayer as if God is a vending machine—a being we must manipulate to get our desired outcome—is an unfortunate misunderstanding of its purpose.

Yes, God cares about our needs and tells us to bring our requests to Him (Philippians 4:6). But this is not the primary purpose of prayer.

The primary purpose of prayer is fellowship—communion with our Creator. It is about spending time with God, inviting Him more fully into our lives, and delighting in His presence. He is our ultimate prize, and prayer is a gift that allows us to enjoy focused, intentional time with Him.

Like a father loves his children, our Heavenly Father loves us deeply. He wants to spend time with us, hear from us, speak to us, and encourage us. This happens most meaningfully in focused prayer times, but it can also occur throughout the day as we stay aware of His constant presence. God is always there, ready to give us strength, wisdom, peace, or even a word for someone else. Just as a son confidently approaches a loving father, we can boldly approach our Heavenly Father, knowing we are welcomed and accepted.

HOW SHOULD WE APPROACH GOD?

We approach Him with reverence and awe. He is God. While some might encourage a casual view of God—suggesting He is like your “bro” or someone to chat with casually—let me be clear: God is not your bro. He is the Creator of the universe, the One who sustains your every breath. From Isaiah to Ezekiel to John, the universal reaction to God’s presence has been to fall to the ground in awe and trembling.

That does not mean you must use fancy or formal words to pray. What matters is the posture of your heart and mind. Speak to God as you would to a friend, but always with an awareness that He is the incredible, holy God. He deserves our utmost respect, humility, and adoration when we pray before Him. If we approach our earthly fathers respectfully, how much more should we approach our Heavenly Father with honor and reverence?

HOW SHOULD WE PRAY?

Once our hearts are correctly positioned before God, we are ready to pray. But what should prayer look like? Are there steps?

There are countless methods of prayer, and most of them are good. The most important thing is to find an approach that helps you authentically connect with God. I vary my prayer time depending on the circumstances—whether it is morning or evening, a short or extended time of prayer—but I try to follow some basic principles.

1. **Recognize God:** I usually begin my prayers by recognizing and praising God for who He is—my King. This is the respect He deserves as my Creator. I invite His rule, reign, and wisdom into my life and home. Sometimes, I focus on a specific attribute of God, such as omnipotence, wisdom, or lovingkindness. This daily practice reminds me of who God is, shifts my focus away from myself, and orients my heart to honor the One who is truly worthy of praise and adoration. This posture pleases God and aligns with His promise to give grace to those who humbly submit themselves to Him (James 4:6).
2. **Confess:** I know my own heart better than anyone else. Just like the Apostle Paul considered himself the chief of sinners, I too recognize the authentic state of my heart before God more than anyone else (1 Timothy 1:15). Yet, God promises us that if we confess our sins, He faithfully forgives us and wipes the slate clean (1 John 1:9). Many times I know what I need to confess before Him; however, if there I times where I am not sure, I will ask God to show me anything within me that offends Him (Psalm 139:23-24).
3. **Thank God:** Gratitude is a key part of my prayers. I always take time to thank God, often for something I usually take for granted. Reflecting on what my life would be like without that blessing helps me see its value and appreciate God's provision. Of course, I also thank Him for the big blessings, like my wife and family. This practice helps me focus my heart on the gifts He has already given me, building my faith for the present and the future.
4. **Listen:** It is impossible to hear someone speak if you do all the talking, so I intentionally set aside time in my prayers to listen. After inviting God's presence, I sit silently, waiting to hear from Him. This is not easy—my mind is often racing!

When distractions arise, I mentally set those thoughts aside, like a “to-do list” stored for later, and refocus on Him.

While I rarely hear God speak directly and specifically, I know He can and does. Most often, He speaks through His Word as I read it, but I have also experienced moments when He speaks so clearly that I cannot deny it. These moments always align with scripture and are unmistakable. Even when I do not hear something specific, this step fills me with peace and hope rooted in God’s overwhelming grace.

5. **Request His Presence:** This is the part of prayer where I bring my requests to God. Over the years, I have learned to center these requests on asking for more of His presence and for His will to be done in every situation. Early on, I focused on specific wants or solutions to problems that consumed my thoughts. Yet, I have found it far more valuable to seek His presence more than anything else.

I still bring my needs to Him, but now I approach them humbly, recognizing that He is wise and I am not. I may think I know what I need, but God knows what I need. Scripture encourages us to ask and seek what we need (Matthew 7:7-8), which is entirely proper. However, supporting a humble faith is essential; trusting God knows what is best for us.

God sees the eternal picture, while we often focus only on the temporary. What is truly best for us may not be fully understood. This is why we can trust He is still moving even when God’s response seems absent or unexpected. He always works for our ultimate good, even in ways we cannot see or understand in the moment.

THE ESSENCE OF PRAYER

Prayer is simply talking to God and allowing Him to minister to you through daily surrender. It does not need to be complicated or filled with elaborate words, but it should always be respectful, honoring, and authentic.

Prayer is also a time when God pours into you. It is funny how we sometimes think we are doing something for God by spending time with Him. Yes, He wants to be with us and wants us to love Him. But here is the truth: God does not need

anything from us. He is entirely self-sufficient. Recognizing this is liberating because it removes pressure to “perform” or bring something to God. He does not need us to meet His needs—because He has none. Even the things He desires from us are ultimately for our benefit.

He wants us to love Him because He knows He is what we need most. He wants us to spend time with Him to experience His peace. He calls us to surrender our lives because His ways are perfect. Through prayer, God fills us with His love so that it overflows into the lives of others—especially into the life of your wife.

Your wife needs constant love just as much as you do. There will be hard seasons when she may not pursue God’s love for herself as she should. This is why God placed you in her life. You are uniquely positioned to show her God’s love in those moments and lovingly call her back to Him. She is there to do the same for you.

The most prosperous seasons in marriage happen when both husband and wife seek God together. Imagine two people, both filled with God’s love, focusing on outdoing one another in love, first for each other and then for others. Such a marriage cannot fail.

CORPORATE WORSHIP

Worship is attributing ultimate worth, reverence, and adoration to God. It encompasses every aspect of our lives, as we are called always to worship Him with our whole selves. However, the specific type of worship I want to focus on here is corporate worship—the collective gathering of believers to glorify God. This usually occurs in a church but can also happen in smaller groups, such as among friends or within a family.

Corporate worship is about coming together to encourage one another to glorify God, declare Him our King, and invite His presence into our lives. When we worship collectively, we lift God high, taking our eyes off ourselves, our pride, and our problems. We magnify His greatness, remind one another of His power and faithfulness, and crown Him as the only rightful ruler of our lives. We recommit our hearts to His Lordship through worship, surrendering our will and ways to Him. God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are exalted in our midst, becoming the

sole focus of our attention and desire.

WHY CORPORATE WORSHIP MATTERS

While we can and should worship God as individuals—and I can testify to God's goodness in personal worship—there is something uniquely powerful about worshipping together. Remember that God designed us as social beings built for community. When we unite in heart and mind to glorify God, we encourage and inspire one another to pursue Him more deeply.

Sometimes, in the middle of worship, I look around the room. What I see stirs my soul: hundreds of faces, some filled with joy and tears, others grappling with hope, confusion, or even discomfort. And yet, as worship continues, something shifts. Those who initially seem reserved begin to engage—tapping a foot, lifting a hand, or even fully immersing themselves in worship.

This is the beauty of corporate worship: our actions spur one another on to pursue God more fervently. I know this because I have also experienced the opposite.

THE IMPACT OF OUR WORSHIP ON OTHERS

We have all stood next to someone who is either new to corporate worship or simply uncomfortable with exuberant expressions of praise. I have allowed people like this to influence my level of worship before, holding back when I should have been worshipping freely. But I have learned a better way: instead of toning down my worship, I have realized the power of leading by example. When we worship exuberantly, we invite others to take their next step toward a more intimate experience with God.

Am I saying that outward expressions of worship—clapping, singing, raising hands—correlate to more extraordinary encounters with God? Yes, I am!

AN ILLUSTRATION FROM PARENTHOOD

Imagine this: you are a father coming home from work. Your children see you enter the house, but instead of running to greet you, they stay where they are, barely glancing up. As a dad, I have experienced this—usually when my kids are glued to a screen—making me feel unnoticed and uninvited into their lives. Now, contrast this with when my children run to greet me, hugging me and telling me how much

they miss me. Those moments make me feel valued, loved, and welcomed.

This is a picture of what happens in worship. Like a child joyfully running to their father, exuberant worship expresses love, desire, and a heartfelt invitation for God to be present in our lives.

A BIBLICAL EXAMPLE OF EXUBERANT WORSHIP

One of the most outstanding examples of exuberant worship is King David dancing before the Ark of the Covenant as it was brought into Jerusalem (2 Samuel 6:14-22). David worshiped with abandon, offering God his complete devotion regardless of what others thought.

AND DAVID DANCED BEFORE THE LORD WITH ALL HIS MIGHT. AND DAVID WAS WEARING A LINEN EPHOD. SO DAVID AND ALL THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL BROUGHT UP THE ARK OF THE LORD WITH SHOUTING AND WITH THE SOUND OF THE HORN. 2 SAMUEL 6:14,15 ESV³²

Do not miss this crucial detail: David was the king of all Israel and his nation's supreme ruler. Yet, he worshiped God unabashedly before all his people, setting the ultimate example of how even the most noble among us should approach worship. David did not worry about preserving his dignity or image; his only focus was on ascribing worth and honor to God. This is what true worship looks like—a wholehearted offering that fills us with God's love.

HOW SHOULD WE WORSHIP CORPORATELY?

Paul provides a framework for corporate worship best described as controlled exuberance. It sounds paradoxical, but it is not. In his instructions for worship, Paul emphasizes the importance of allowing people to worship God freely and boldly while keeping order. He writes:

SO, MY BROTHERS, EARNESTLY DESIRE TO PROPHECY, AND DO NOT FORBID SPEAKING IN TONGUES. BUT ALL THINGS SHOULD BE DONE DECENTLY AND IN ORDER. 1 CORINTHIANS 14:39,40 ESV

Here, Paul explicitly mentions prophecy and speaking in tongues—acts of worship that should be encouraged rather than suppressed. His point, however, applies to all forms of worship. Just as Paul instructs early Christians to worship boldly and

exuberantly, so are we. Scripture paints a beautiful picture of worship as an act that engages mind and body simultaneously. Worship involves:

- Singing (Psalm 96:1–2)
- Lifting our hands (1 Timothy 2:8; Psalm 63:4)
- Dancing (2 Samuel 6:14)
- Shouting (Psalm 100:1–2)
- Clapping our hands (Psalm 47:1)

The Bible encourages outward, physical expressions of worship as manifestations of inward realities. We use our bodies to worship God, even in ways that might feel undignified, because He is worthy of it. No one else deserves our excitement and passion more than He does.

Think about how people behave at a sporting event—cheering, shouting, and celebrating their team with wild enthusiasm. Shouldn't God, the Creator and King of all, receive at least twice that much effort and attention?

EXUBERANCE WITH ORDER

While worship should be exuberant, Paul also instructs us to maintain order. The purpose of this order is to avoid distracting others. I have always gone to charismatic churches, and while I have seen many authentic expressions of worship, there have been moments where specific actions—though genuine—were very distracting to others. Our worship should encourage others, not hinder them. For example, lifting your hands and shouting praise during a meaningful moment in a worship song can inspire those around you to engage more deeply. However, standing up and crying out during a quiet prayer can significantly distract.

Trust the Holy Spirit to guide you in worshiping in a way that is authentic and appropriate for your church context.

UNITED WORSHIP

As with all spiritual disciplines, we do not worship because God needs it—He does not. Worship is for us to experience the ultimate prize: God Himself. Amazingly, as we magnify God in worship, He reverses the situation and blesses us. When we approach Him in repentance, humility, and honor, we invite His presence to move

powerfully in our lives.

Why spend so much time talking about worship? Because it's one of the most powerful ways to fill your heart with God's love—and I've seen far too many men miss out on this incredible blessing. As men, we often worship more reservedly. If we're honest, that hesitation usually comes from pride and a fear of looking foolish. But just as David was blessed for becoming undignified so that his God might be lifted high, there is blessing waiting for the man who is willing to lay down his self-conscious pride. And let's be honest—no one is going to think less of you for it. No man was ever looked down on for worshiping God with greater passion; more often than not, the result is respect, honor, and gratitude from those around him.

The more fully you engage, the richer the experience—not only for you, but also for your marriage. There is nothing quite like worshiping alongside your spouse. It creates a powerful bond when you seek God together and encourage each other toward more wholehearted, joyful praise. Don't miss this gift. Dive in with your whole heart and experience the fullness of His love—for you, and for your marriage.

OBEDIENCE TO GOD'S COMMANDS

Our society often struggles with the concept of commands. Obedience to rules is seen as restrictive or even oppressive. Among modern Christians in America, "legalism" is usually shunned—and rightly so, in its most rigid forms. But there is a vital difference between embracing commands as life-giving guides and being enslaved to rigid law adherence. The former is a healthy and necessary part of life; the latter is an unhealthy and impossible pursuit.

I want to distinguish between the law's spirit and the law's letter. Jesus illustrates this beautifully in the Sermon on the Mount. He takes familiar examples from the law and points to the higher standard—the spirit behind them. For instance, the letter of the law says, "Do not murder," but the spirit of the law calls us to avoid hatred in our hearts. The letter of the law says, "Do not commit adultery," but the spirit of the law challenges us to remain faithful in both mind and body (Matthew 5:21–28).

The purpose of God's law, with all its rules and commands, is to point us to His higher moral authority—His very nature. All moral values and duties stem from

God's essential character. He is the standard of goodness, and as beings made in His image, we flourish when we align our lives with His nature.

THE CONSEQUENCES OF WILLFUL DISOBEDIENCE

Nothing will make you more miserable than willful, blatant disobedience to God. I am not talking about accidental sins or areas of ignorance. I am referring to those moments when God clearly reveals sin in your life, and you look back at Him and say, "No."

Scripture speaks extensively about the dangers of willful disobedience (Numbers 15:30–31; Deuteronomy 28:15; Hebrews 10:26–27; James 4:17). Why is disobedience so severe? Can't we hold on to just one vice? Where is the grace in this?

Disobedience is so damaging because it reveals something we refuse to surrender. It is a declaration that we prefer to worship our sins rather than God. In essence, we are asking God to step off the throne of our hearts so we can rule instead. Even worse, we often expect God to stay close, covering us with His blessings while we continue our rebellion.

This is like a drug-addicted teenager asking their parent to stay close while they get high—just in case something goes wrong. Any loving parent would instead intervene to free their child from destruction. Similarly, God disciplines us in love to bring us back to Him, even when the process is painful.

**FOR THE MOMENT ALL DISCIPLINE SEEMS PAINFUL RATHER
THAN PLEASANT, BUT LATER IT YIELDS THE PEACEFUL FRUIT OF
RIGHTEOUSNESS TO THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN TRAINED BY IT. HEBREWS
12:11 ESV**

DISCIPLINE: GOD'S LOVING CORRECTION

Discipline—through punishment, rewards, or structure—is an act of love. Correcting a child is often difficult, but withholding discipline leads to disaster. Good parents recognize that children need guidance to grow into morally upright and functional members of society. How much more does God understand this about us?

God often allows us to experience the consequences of our disobedience, not to punish us but to bring us back to repentance. The story of Jonah illustrates this

perfectly. Jonah blatantly disobeyed God's command and ended up in the belly of a great fish for three days. It may seem harsh, but God used this extreme consequence to lead Jonah back to obedience. A friend of mine refers to this as a "get down or lay down" situation—God loves us too much to leave us in disobedience, even if it means allowing hard lessons to draw us back to Him.

WHY PERSONAL OBEDIENCE MATTERS

Why focus so much on personal obedience? Because refusing to worship God through obedience means you worship the sin you refuse to give up. That sin becomes an idol, controls your life, and steals your focus away from God. You cannot receive God's love if your heart is divided. You cannot pour God's love into your wife if you are filling yourself with sin and rebellion.

This process may take years, but fighting against these "little gods" and reorienting your heart to worship the one true God is essential. Only He is the source of love, and only He can fill you to overflowing so that you can love your wife as He intends.

GIVING (TITHE & OFFERINGS)

While all spiritual disciplines are profitable and necessary for flourishing as God designs, nothing shows your faith in God's ways more tangibly than putting your personal resources on the line.

WHAT IS TITHING?

For those unfamiliar, tithing is giving the first ten percent of your income to the local institution from which you attain spiritual nourishment, basically the Church (Numbers 18:21–24). As a young man, I tithed regularly because my father taught me it was the right thing to do. I cared about the church and wanted to see it grow. However, I also took pride in giving, believing it would earn me "God points" for blessings. While I always had enough, I did not feel a deep sense of God's favor. Why? Because my heart posture was wrong.

I gave out of obligation and expectation, thinking God "owed" me something in return. When financial struggles hit and we needed a new car, I rationalized that tithing was no longer necessary. I told myself the New Testament did not explicitly teach tithing, so it was okay to let it go. I could still find ways to be generous occasionally

while meeting my family's needs. But what happened next taught me an important lesson. Consider the following verse:

GIVE FREELY AND BECOME MORE WEALTHY; BE STINGY AND LOSE EVERYTHING. PROVERBS 11:24 NLT

My financial world grew smaller and smaller. Despite my best efforts, I kept falling behind. God still met our needs in His grace, but we were missing the abundance He had for us. The problem was not the tithe—it was my mindset.

WHAT TITHING TEACHES

One day, my pastor, Derick Amsler of Crossroads Church, explained tithing in a way that changed my perspective. He said tithing and generosity are not about “getting something” from God but about demonstrating faith in God's promise to provide. When we withhold resources from God, we show two things:

1. We do not trust Him to do what He has promised.
2. We are not ready to steward more resources because we have misused what He gave us.

Tithing is an active step of faith, declaring that we trust God to provide for us. Withholding money from God is like a child refusing to hand their broken toy to a parent who can fix it. The child is so afraid of losing the toy that they settle for keeping it broken. But if the child finally gives it up, a loving parent does not take it away or break it further—they restore it to its best condition. How much more does our Heavenly Father want to bless us when we trust Him?

THE CALL TO RADICAL GENEROSITY

After three years of wrestling with this, I sensed God calling my wife and me to give more than we thought we could. Tithing 10% was no longer our goal because, while it demonstrated obedience, we wanted to demonstrate faith. We sensed God asked us to give about 15% of our income to the church and those around us.

Honestly, it was terrifying. I cried when we decided because it created a massive budget deficit. For 12 months, we depleted our savings and struggled financially. Yet, by the end of that year, God had provided through a promotion, the revival of a business, and a restructuring of our debt. Our budget was balanced again, but

that was not the real blessing.

The real blessing was the peace and freedom we experienced. For the first time, I let go of financial worry and placed it in my Father's hands. I was not rich; this is not some "prosperity gospel" testimony. Instead, it was about finally trusting God and tangibly experiencing His love and care.

Tithing and generosity do not mean sitting back and doing nothing. We still worked hard, made financial adjustments, and did everything possible. What mattered was the posture of our hearts—a willingness to obey and trust God. When we bring our best effort, God transforms it for our good.

HOW GIVING RELATES TO GOD'S LOVE

Generosity is deeply connected to experiencing and sharing God's love. Financial peace flows from trusting God to provide, and this trust fills you with His love and assurance. My dad often shows his love through provision, one of the most tangible ways I have felt loved by him.

In the same way, when we see God provide for us, we are filled with His love and peace. Instead of worrying about money—an issue that can tear marriages apart—it becomes a source of unity and trust. This love then overflows into your marriage, enabling you to love your wife as God loves you.

A generous, faith-filled husband can help his wife grow in her trust in God by demonstrating daily love, provision, and assurance rooted in God's faithfulness. Let go of financial worry and trust God with your resources. In doing so, you open yourself to His blessings and create space for His love to overflow into your marriage.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Many people see spiritual practices as burdens—strict requirements imposed by a God on a power trip. Like the ancients of old, they perceive God as a tyrant who must be appeased lest He strike them down for their defiance. What a tragedy to be caught in a cycle of obligation, merely going through the motions.

But pause for just a moment and consider this: Does God actually need anything from us? He is the very source of our breath and being, yet we reduce Him to

someone driven by the same petty desires as us.

The truth is, God has no need for our spiritual practices—which means they must be for our benefit! They are not heavy burdens placed on us by a distant deity but invitations to draw nearer to the One who loves us deeply and longs for our flourishing. These disciplines call us to surrender our lives into God's hands—not for His gain, but for ours. And what is that gain? Love.

Drawing near and surrendering to God fills us with His love. It transforms our hearts from self-centeredness to humble generosity, ready to overflow with the love He has poured into us. As you walk in these practices, you will experience His joy, peace, and love—blessings that naturally spill over into your marriage. The beauty of this? When your wife sees you walking closely with Christ, she will likely follow your lead. And as she, too, is filled with God's love, your marriage becomes a beautiful dance of two people competing to bless one another.

The foundation for it all? God's love. Run to Him and allow Him to fill you—so you can overflow with His goodness.

Section 3

MARRIAGE
PRINCIPLES

Chapter Seven

Living by Principle

TRUST IN THE LORD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND DO NOT LEAN ON
YOUR OWN UNDERSTANDING. IN ALL YOUR WAYS ACKNOWLEDGE HIM,
AND HE WILL MAKE STRAIGHT YOUR PATHS. PROVERBS 3:5,6 ESV

When I reflect on the array of biblical figures who embody what it means to live a principled life, it is not easy to think of anyone more exemplary than the prophet Daniel. Taken into exile under King Nebuchadnezzar, Daniel was among the first to live in Babylon. Repeatedly, his steadfast adherence to godly principles guided him and saved his life and the lives of many others.

Most people are familiar with the story of Daniel in the lion's den. By the time this event occurs, Daniel is serving as an advisor to King Darius. His faithfulness and incorruptibility are so remarkable that his jealous enemies find no fault in his character they can exploit (Daniel 6:4). His adversaries conclude the only way to eliminate him is to make his faithful obedience to God illegal. Knowing Daniel prayed daily, they convinced King Darius to issue a decree forbidding prayer to anyone but the king for 30 days. Look at what Daniel does in response:

WHEN DANIEL KNEW THAT THE DOCUMENT HAD BEEN SIGNED,
HE WENT TO HIS HOUSE WHERE HE HAD WINDOWS IN HIS UPPER
CHAMBER OPEN TOWARD JERUSALEM. HE GOT DOWN ON HIS KNEES
THREE TIMES A DAY AND PRAYED AND GAVE THANKS BEFORE HIS GOD,
AS HE HAD DONE PREVIOUSLY. DANIEL 6:10 ESV

Imagine yourself in Daniel's position. You come home and see the familiar window

where you always pray. You have just heard about the king's decree and realize you face a life-or-death decision. You want to remain obedient to God, praying as He commands, but you know this act could lead to your execution. You do not know if God will save you this time. Yes, He has delivered you before, but perhaps now He will allow your life to be taken.

You approach the window and consider, "Maybe I could pray somewhere else, away from prying eyes." But you at once reject the thought. Hiding would not only show weakness to your enemies but, more importantly, dishonor your God. You take another step toward the window. Looking out, you see your enemies waiting, watching, ready to report you to the king.

It must have been an intense moment for Daniel. While the Bible does not elaborate on his demeanor, it is not hard to imagine him gazing boldly at his foes as he knelt in defiance of the king's law. As in every other trial of his life, Daniel passed the test before the ultimate King, and God took notice.

Daniel's courage and obedience testify to his unshakable trust in God. He walked in humble faithfulness, no matter the cost.

PRINCIPLES

Principles are guidelines or rules of personal behavior that can be applied consistently across various situations. In and of themselves, principles are neither inherently good nor bad. Evaluating a principle as good or bad depends entirely on the moral standard to which it is compared.

For Christians, morality has a firm foundation in God's nature. God is the ultimate standard of goodness, and His essence radiates righteousness. A principle is good and right only to the extent that it aligns with God's nature. Considering the moral relativism prevalent in our culture today, you need to be intimately familiar with this truth.

Modern culture suggests that principled living is whatever you decide it should be. This mindset reflects the pride that led to humanity's fall in the Garden of Eden. When faced with the choice between "God" and "not God," humanity chose "not God." This is the original sin: rejecting God's way in favor of man's way, redefining

good and evil on our terms.

Expressions like “You do you,” “Live your truth,” and “Be your truest self” exemplify the prideful notion that we can define reality and morality for ourselves. However, principled living is not subjective or relativistic—it is objective.

Truths are always true, moral values are always applicable, and the moral duties God has placed upon all humanity remain today. To live a genuinely good life, we must align our principles with God’s nature and will, not our preferences or desires³³.

WHY SHOULD WE LIVE BY PRINCIPLES?

Principles are valuable because they offer broad applicability. It is too complicated—and often impossible—to evaluate the right or wrong of every individual situation in real time. Instead, we rely on familiar, guiding behaviors that can be adapted depending on the circumstances. For example, the Golden Rule teaches us to treat others as we would want to be treated. This principle can guide us to show generosity, let go of offenses, or help those in need: same principle, different applications. Principles in marriage work the same way. I could never hope to guide you through every scenario you will face in married life. However, I can teach you principles that will serve you well in most situations.

THE DANGER OF LIVING WITHOUT PRINCIPLES

The opposite of a principled life is inconsistent, opportunism, or moral relativism. Such a life can be characterized by:

- **Lack of Integrity:** A person may act dishonestly or inconsistently without principles. James 1:8 describes such a person as “*a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.*”
- **Moral Relativism:** Rather than adhering to consistent moral standards, one may change beliefs or behaviors for convenience or gain. Judges 21:25 laments, “*In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as they saw fit.*”
- **Self-Centeredness:** People may prioritize their desires above others’ well-being without guiding principles. Philippians 2:3-4 teaches, “*Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility, value others above yourselves.*”

- **Short-Term Thinking:** A lack of principles often leads to focusing on immediate gratification instead of long-term values. Proverbs 14:12 warns, “*There is a way that appears to be right, but in the end it leads to death.*”
- **Avoiding Accountability:** Without principles, people may evade responsibility for their actions. Yet Hebrews 4:13 reminds us, “*Nothing in all creation is hidden from God’s sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.*”

A life without principles often results in chaos, purposelessness, and moral confusion.

THE CHALLENGE AND REWARD OF LIVING BY PRINCIPLES

Adhering to principles can be costly. It often demands grit and sacrifice. For example, practicing true forgiveness—especially in marriage—can be painful when someone deeply wrongs you. But there are rewards for granting forgiveness: restored relationships and the assurance of God’s mercy for your sins (Matthew 6:14-15). Godly principles always prove worthwhile, even during seasons when they seem ineffective.

Living by principles also makes your behavior consistent and reliable. Those around you know what to expect when they interact with you. Over time, these principles become second nature, but this requires both belief in their goodness and deliberate effort to implement them.

JMH FRAMEWORK FOR PRINCIPLED LIVING

One of the most helpful summaries of godly principles comes from the prophet Micah:

HE HAS TOLD YOU, O MAN, WHAT IS GOOD; AND WHAT DOES THE LORD REQUIRE OF YOU BUT TO DO JUSTICE, AND TO LOVE KINDNESS, AND TO WALK HUMBLY WITH YOUR GOD? MICAH 6:8 ESV

I revere this verse for its simplicity, clarity, and broad applicability. It reminds me who I am in Christ and what God requires of me. Make no mistake—God places moral duties (i.e., requirements) upon us. Jesus Himself summarized these duties in two great commandments:

AND HE SAID TO HIM, “YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH

ALL YOUR HEART AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND. THIS IS THE GREAT AND FIRST COMMANDMENT. AND A SECOND IS LIKE IT: YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF. ON THESE TWO COMMANDMENTS DEPEND ALL THE LAW AND THE PROPHETS.”
MATTHEW 22: 37-40 ESV

These two commands form the foundation of godly living. However, I do not believe Jesus intended for us to stop there. Instead, He pointed us to the heart of God’s law: loving Him and sharing His love with others. Micah 6:8 offers a deep, practical framework for understanding what this looks like in everyday life.

The Justice, Mercy, and Humility (JMH) Framework is a simple mnemonic to help you apply principles in marriage and beyond. The letters correspond to three guiding principles:

- J: Do Justice
- M: Love Mercy
- H: Walk Humbly

ORGANIZATION OF FRAMEWORK

The JMH Framework is built on three broad principles from Micah 6:8: Do Justice, Love Mercy, and Walk Humbly. Each principle is further divided into sub-principles to provide an expanded definition and application in daily life.

These principles can guide a wide range of interactions with your wife and help you focus on your behavior. They are not about highlighting your wife’s faults or adopting a victim mindset. Instead, they focus on taking ownership of your actions and transforming your life and marriage by surrendering yourself to God.

For each principle, we will review:

- **Meaning & Purpose:** a description of the principle and its importance.
- **Mindset:** the authentic beliefs God calls us to have.
- **Words of Life:** how we authentically communicate the truths of our mindset to our wives.
- **Actions:** tangible ways you can use this principle in your marriage.

MEANING AND PURPOSE

These sections will be straightforward. I will explain what each principle is and why it matters in the context of your life and marriage.

MINDSET

When I refer to a mindset, I am talking about the foundational beliefs you must embrace to live out a given principle. Intellectually grasping these concepts is insufficient—you must genuinely accept and internalize them. Why is this critical?

Your wife—and people in general—are incredibly adept at sensing insincerity. While strangers may occasionally struggle to discern your motives, your wife knows you better than anyone. She has spent more time observing and understanding you than anyone else and will immediately notice inauthenticity. However, when your beliefs align with your actions, your behavior will be genuine and meaningful. This authenticity is essential for building trust and fostering intimate connections.

WORDS OF LIFE

Your words influence your wife's life because you are her closest relationship. They can uplift and encourage her or wound and tear her down. Tragically, some men use their words to diminish their wives. This can be particularly devastating in a world where many women struggle to see their inherent worth. That is why speaking words of life into your wife is so important—not just casual or occasional compliments, but sincere, heartfelt affirmations that rejuvenate her soul.

How do you do this? Start by pausing whatever she is doing and drawing her full attention. I like to bring my wife close, hold her, and look directly into her eyes with a smile. Then, I speak a specific and encouraging word into her spirit. It might be about a character trait I admire, gratitude for something she has done, or simply an affirmation of who she is. Whatever it is, I say it with complete sincerity and conviction.

When done authentically, the reaction will be overwhelmingly positive. This act communicates that you deeply care for, see, and value her. It builds trust by showing that your motives are genuine. Most importantly, she will start to internalize the truth of your words and believe them herself.

ACTIONS

I aim to equip you to radically transform your marriage by answering God's call to lead. To that end, I will provide real-life situations where you can apply these principles. As you reflect on each principle, invite God into the process. Ask Him to guide you in finding the words you should speak over your wife and your actions to show love and leadership.

You will never do any of this perfectly. At times, it will feel uncomfortable, awkward, or even humiliating. But those feelings often stem from personal pride. Improving your marriage is not for the faint of heart but for the courageous man willing to pursue the prize of his beloved's heart.

THE ROAD AHEAD

In the rest of this chapter, we will explore each broad principle at a general level. In later chapters, we will break them down into specific sub-principles. We will examine the Hebrew meanings of the keywords from Micah 6:8, reflect on God's attributes of justice, mercy, and humility, and consider how we, as His image-bearers, can reflect these attributes in our marriages.

DO JUSTICE

HEBREW MEANING

What does Scripture mean when it says to "do justice"? For most of us, "justice" evokes ideas of fairness and equal treatment under the law. The Hebrew word for justice, **mishpat**, encompasses this concept but goes deeper³⁴. It refers to judicial processes, decisions, and the administration of justice. For the original audience, mishpat conveyed the fair and impartial application of laws, ensuring that even societal structures reflected God's will for justice. Yet biblical justice is more than a legal framework; it reflects God's heart and character.

GOD'S ATTRIBUTE OF JUSTICE

To fully grasp justice, we must first understand it as an essential attribute of God. Consider the prophet Isaiah:

**BUT THE LORD OF HOSTS IS EXALTED IN JUSTICE, AND THE HOLY GOD
SHOWS HIMSELF HOLY IN RIGHTEOUSNESS. ISAIAH 5:16**

This verse interrelates three foundational aspects of God's character:

- **God is exalted by His justice:** In context, Isaiah is warning Judah's wicked and prideful people that their temporary high-living will be brought low, while God, by contrast, will be exalted. God's justice is an attribute that increases His glory. It affirms His absolute goodness and reinforces why He is worthy of honor.
- **God is holy:** Holiness means God is set apart as morally perfect, unique, and pure. There is none like Him. His moral perfection is the source of His justice. Because of His holiness, God cannot tolerate evil or sin; His nature compels Him to purify creation of all unrighteousness.
- **God is righteous:** Righteousness means being "in the right" and is a relational attribute. To be righteous is to act rightly in one's relationships—with oneself, others, and God. God's righteousness is the perfection of all His dealings, whether glorifying Himself or judging humanity. His righteousness demands that He reward those who receive His mercy and punish those who reject Him as Lord.

In other words, God's justice is the force emanating from His holiness that guarantees His righteousness. He cannot ignore sin; His nature compels Him to eliminate evil. God carries this out in three primary ways:

1. **He requires holiness from His creatures.** Justice demands perfect adherence to God's goodness. Since this is impossible for humanity to achieve alone, God provides the means through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. Through Christ, we are made righteous.
2. **He requires propitiation for wrongs.** Justice demands that sin's debt be paid. Unable to satisfy this on our own, Christ took our place, satisfying the demands of justice on humanity's behalf. God Himself bore the punishment we could not.
3. **He requires restoration of sin's effects.** Even forgiven sins have relational and societal consequences. For example, lying damages trust, which can only be rebuilt through time and proven faithfulness. God's justice seeks forgiveness and the restoration of these tangential effects of sin.

APPLICATION TO MARRIAGE

What does justice have to do with marriage? The command to “do justice” reminds us of how we should lead, think about, and treat our wives.

As image-bearers of God, we are called to reflect His attributes, including justice, in our relationships. Marriage involves partnering with God to bring His justice into the world, allowing righteousness to flow through our relationship with our spouses. Additionally, as ambassadors for Christ, we should take the initiative to practice justice within our marriages. When we “do justice” in marriage, we:

1. **Lead in holiness:** We set an example for our wives by humbly obeying God first. Our leadership in holiness demonstrates what it means to walk with Him.
2. **Seek equality:** We honor our wives by elevating them to their rightful place as co-heirs with Christ. This includes restoring areas where societal or relational dynamics have diminished their value or voice.
3. **Love as Christ loves:** We put our wives first, giving of our time, resources, and energy in service to their well-being.

LOVE MERCY

HEBREW MEANING

The Hebrew word used in Micah 6:8 for mercy is **hesed**. This word conveys a profound sense of lovingkindness and loyalty, embodying a compassionate and steadfast love. Most people grasp the basic concept of mercy, often thinking of it as withholding punishment from someone who deserves it or forgiving a debt. While biblical mercy includes these ideas, it goes further because it reflects God's mercy, which is far greater than human mercy.

GOD'S ATTRIBUTE OF MERCY (LOVINGKINDNESS)

To reflect God's mercy as His image-bearers, we must first understand His mercy. Consider these verses:

THE LORD PASSED BEFORE HIM AND PROCLAIMED, 'THE LORD, THE LORD, A GOD MERCIFUL AND GRACIOUS, SLOW TO ANGER, AND ABOUNDING IN STEADFAST LOVE AND FAITHFULNESS, KEEPING

**STEADFAST LOVE FOR THOUSANDS, FORGIVING INIQUITY AND
TRANSGRESSION AND SIN...' EXODUS 34:6-7A ESV**

**BUT YOU, O LORD, ARE A GOD MERCIFUL AND GRACIOUS, SLOW TO
ANGER AND ABOUNDING IN STEADFAST LOVE AND FAITHFULNESS.
PSALM 86:15 ESV**

God is merciful, kind, and loving by nature—it is who He is. Scripture is filled with countless examples of God's mercy:

- He showed mercy to humanity through His covenant with Noah, promising never to flood the earth again and guaranteeing seasons of planting and harvest.
- He rescued the Israelites from Egyptian slavery.
- He withheld just punishment from the Israelites after their idolatry with the golden calf.
- He delivered Israel repeatedly from their oppressors despite their rebellion and unfaithfulness.
- He rewarded Ruth's faithfulness to Naomi with steadfast love, blessing her in a foreign land.

Notice that in each instance, God's mercy is abundant and selfless. He forgives sin, shows kindness, and acts for our good because He loves us. His culminating act of mercy being the cross, God rescued us while we were still sinners. He did not see us for who we were but who we could become—His glorious children. He encourages us toward that glory at every step. This is the mercy we are to reflect. But it does not stop there.

God does not merely command us to show mercy but to love it. It is not enough to grudgingly obey by showing mercy. We are to embrace mercy as a defining part of who we are. Loving mercy means exuberantly seeking opportunities to show kindness, forgiveness, and steadfast love in every interaction with others.

APPLICATION TO MARRIAGE

Mercy in marriage is transformative. Its presence is beautiful, and its absence can be devastating. For men, showing mercy often means setting aside ego and embracing lovingkindness and humility. When we fully grasp the concept of loving mercy, it can radically change how we relate to our wives.

When we “love mercy” in marriage we:

1. **Forgive First:** As husbands, we should take the initiative to forgive. This means letting go of past offenses and refusing to hold them over our wives’ heads. Mercy requires us to lead by example in reconciliation.
2. **Give Lovingkindness:** Mercy calls us to bless our wives generously, whether in words, actions, or small thoughtful gestures. It also means overlooking what we might think they “owe” us and loving them unconditionally.

WALK HUMBLY

HEBREW MEANING

The biblical word for “humbly” in Micah 6:8 is **hatsnea**, which conveys walking modestly or humbly with God and living for His recognition instead of your own³⁵. It emphasizes an attitude of submission and reverence in one’s relationship with Him, being willing and ready to obey Him.

Another key Hebrew term for humility in Scripture is **anavah**, which means humility or meekness as a character trait³⁶. Humility, in biblical terms, does not mean belittling oneself, as this would dishonor the image of God in you and ironically shift your focus back onto yourself. Instead, humility is about being unconcerned with glorifying your name and recognizing how your God-given gifts contribute to the greater purpose of bringing glory to God. This is why Moses could write that he was “*more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth*” (Numbers 12:3). Moses was not boasting about his achievements—he understood that everything carried out through him was God’s accomplishment. His focus was on serving the people and glorifying God.

GOD AND HUMILITY (CONDESCENSION)

Humility is unique among God’s attributes because it is not inherent to His nature, like omnipotence or omniscience. Humility involves submission to a higher authority, and since there is no higher being than God, He cannot be humble in this sense. However, we see functional humility in the relationship between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, especially in the incarnation of Jesus Christ.

Jesus, as the Son of God, showed supreme humility by taking on human nature.

Paul captures this beautifully in Philippians:

DO NOTHING FROM SELFISH AMBITION OR CONCEIT, BUT IN HUMILITY COUNT OTHERS MORE SIGNIFICANT THAN YOURSELVES. LET EACH OF YOU LOOK NOT ONLY TO HIS OWN INTERESTS, BUT ALSO TO THE INTERESTS OF OTHERS. HAVE THIS MIND AMONG YOURSELVES, WHICH IS YOURS IN CHRIST JESUS, WHO, THOUGH HE WAS IN THE FORM OF GOD, DID NOT COUNT EQUALITY WITH GOD A THING TO BE GRASPED, BUT EMPTIED HIMSELF, BY TAKING THE FORM OF A SERVANT, BEING BORN IN THE LIKENESS OF MEN. AND BEING FOUND IN HUMAN FORM, HE HUMBLLED HIMSELF BY BECOMING OBEDIENT TO THE POINT OF DEATH, EVEN DEATH ON A CROSS. PHILIPPIANS 2:3-8 ESV

Paul explains that humility is putting others before yourself, valuing their concerns as much as your own, and avoiding comparisons. Each person is on a mission from God and is uniquely equipped to accomplish it. Instead of seeking greatness for yourself, humility calls you to consider how you and those around you fit together for the glory of God.

Then Paul points to Jesus as the ultimate example of humility. Though fully God, Jesus did not cling to His divine privileges. Instead, He took on the form of a servant, entering the world to save humanity. His humility culminated in His submission to the Father's will, even to the point of death on the cross. This act of ultimate condescension proves God's boundless love for us.

Notably, Jesus' humility did not involve self-deprecation or rejecting His identity. He proclaimed His role and identity openly so others might believe in Him. Humility is not about denying your gifts or rejecting recognition; it is about acknowledging that your gifts come from God and using them for His glory.

Jesus' humility also involved serving others: taking on the lowest tasks, showing compassion even in exhaustion, and setting aside His due honor for the sake of others. Most profoundly, He submitted entirely to the Father's will, even when it meant enduring the suffering of the cross (Matthew 26:42).

APPLICATION TO MARRIAGE

Humility in marriage begins with recognizing that God is in charge even as you lead. As the husband, you must lead your wife and family in honoring God. However, this leadership requires daily submission to Christ as your Lord.

Walking humbly in marriage means obeying God's call on your life, no matter how small or insignificant it may seem. Many marriages fail because a man pursues his dreams, forgetting his greater purpose: glorifying God through his marriage and family. Humility calls you to obey God's direction and trust Him for the results, even when it requires sacrifice.

Humility also involves shifting your focus from yourself to your spouse. Walking humbly in marriage means prioritizing her needs and desires and considering her concerns with the same care as your own. When we "walk humbly" in marriage, we:

1. **Lead:** Embrace your God-given role as husband and father, guiding your family with wisdom towards Christ.
2. **Prioritize Your Spouse:** Think about yourself less and value your wife more. Make her needs, desires, and well-being central to your thoughts and actions.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

There was once a season in my marriage where my lack of knowledge on marriage principles was slowly killing our relationship. Couples do not split overnight, but rather through a thousand missteps rooted in self-centered action. The point of living a principled life is to know how to act in any given situation with little thought. You become so practiced at executing the principle that life giving behavior flows from you on a daily basis.

Principles are universally applicable, and the Justice, Mercy, Humility (JMh) framework provides a simple yet instructive way to remember and apply them:

- *Do Justice* reminds you that your wife is your equal and that you are responsible for restoring her to her God-given stature as a co-heir with Christ.
- *Love Mercy* calls you to take the initiative in forgiveness, to lead with compassion, and to shower your wife with lovingkindness and sacrificial love.

- *Walk Humbly* challenges you to submit to God, obey His direction, and trust His ways to bring flourishing to your marriage.

You will build a durable foundation for your marriage by learning and consistently practicing these principles. Then, in your own “Lion’s Den” moment, like Daniel, you will overcome—with God faithfully by your side.

Chapter Eight

Do Justice: Lead in Holiness

HEAR, O ISRAEL: THE LORD OUR GOD, THE LORD IS ONE. YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL AND WITH ALL YOUR MIGHT. DEUTERONOMY 6:4 ESV

One morning at church, I looked over at my beautiful wife as she spoke into a microphone, encouraging the congregation to fix their eyes on Jesus—the One who could help them face any challenge. My chest swelled with admiration, knowing the long and arduous journey that had brought her to this moment. For much of her life, my wife had wrestled with messages from the culture and spiritual opposition that whispered she was inadequate and unusable by God. She had always disliked praying or speaking in front of groups, let alone addressing a crowd of 1,000 people. Yet there she was, letting God use her powerfully in our church. That year, I saw God work through her as she sang songs, stewarded hearts, spoke life, and led with confidence rooted not in herself but in Jesus.

Jesus built her courage and confidence, enabling her to do what I saw that day. I am grateful that He allowed me to play a role in His plan for her. But that role has not always been well-played. Sometimes, my words discouraged her or contributed to her feelings of inadequacy. If I could, I would erase those moments and take back every careless comment. Since I cannot undo them, I have resolved never to repeat them. I am determined to speak life into my wife daily for the rest of our lives. But such a commitment requires more than discipline—it demands a genuine change of mind. I cannot speak words of life to her unless I genuinely believe them. To honor my wife as she deserves, I needed to reconstruct my thoughts on the foundation

of God's Word, recognizing her as someone worthy of respect, honor, and love.

As my mindset shifted, so did my words and actions. I began speaking life into her, encouraging her to reach her full potential in Christ. God placed my wife in this time and space with a unique purpose that only she can fulfill, and part of my role as her husband is to help protect and empower her to achieve it. When she doubts her gifts, I remind her of the ones God has given her. When she feels fear, I pray with her against it. When she feels unattractive, I praise her beauty with sincere admiration. What a privilege it is to be a husband! We hold a special place in our wives' lives—no one else on earth is closer to them, and no one else has the same opportunity to encourage them with words of life.

But this sword has a double edge. The same proximity that allows us to build up our wives also enables us to tear them down. We wound them when we highlight their shortcomings, demean their input, or treat their contributions with casual disdain. We burden them when we criticize or focus on how they do not meet our expectations. I have seen the damage caused by husbands who speak words of destruction over their wives, and I have felt the regret of doing it myself. As husbands, we must lead as Jesus did through service and sacrifice. Jesus never demeaned His followers, even when they fell far short. Instead, He led in a way that propelled them toward their God-given potential. In the same way, our leadership should empower and encourage our wives to fulfill their purpose.

MEANING AND PURPOSE

Life change is complex, and it does not all happen when we make Jesus the Lord of our lives. When we surrender to Christ, many chains—our sins and struggles—begin to fall away. Sometimes, this happens miraculously, as God supernaturally breaks the grip of certain vices. Other times, transformation takes time as we wrestle with the habits and tendencies that hinder us from living a flourishing life. The power behind this transformation is the Holy Spirit, who dwells within us and works to renew us from the inside out.

This transformation process can become even more challenging within the context of marriage. A spouse may wonder why the person they married no longer wants to participate in the same things they once enjoyed before coming to Christ. Their

reaction can vary depending on their spiritual journey. For example, a wife may be thrilled that her husband no longer frequents bars or strip clubs after giving his life to Christ. However, she may be confused or even frustrated when he stops listening to her favorite genre of music or changes other habits she once found familiar. As challenging as this can be, husbands are to lead their families in holiness.

What is holiness? To understand holiness, we must first understand what it means for God to be holy and then explore how we are supposed to reflect His holiness in our lives.

GOD'S ATTRIBUTE OF HOLINESS

God is holy. This means He is unique, set apart, and without equal. There is no one and nothing like Him. He is the supreme being, the source of all right and good. There is no sin, darkness, or imperfection in Him (1 John 1:5). He is perfect in every way. He is so perfect that His presence is dangerous to all imperfect beings, including us. Yet, through the saving power of Jesus' sacrifice, we are deemed worthy to stand before God and experience Him face-to-face in the coming Kingdom. This is because Christ transforms us into holy creatures who will perfectly reflect God's glory. However, this transformation is not completed all at once on this side of eternity.

Why doesn't God make us perfectly holy all at once? Two reasons come to mind. The first is the one we discussed previously in this book. God's ultimate purpose in creation is to bring free creatures into a loving relationship with Himself. This means our ongoing wrestling with sin and gradual submission to the Holy Spirit serves a purpose. God uses our transformation as a witness to others as they see His grace working in our lives.

Second, imagine how overwhelming it would be if God perfected us instantly. If we fully understood the depth of our sinfulness the moment we are saved, many of us might despair, believing that improvement was impossible. Instead, God works on us gradually in His mercy and grace, giving us the time we need to grow in faith, trust, and dependence on Him.

REFLECTING GOD'S HOLINESS

How, then, do we reflect God's holiness? Two significant ideas stand out: separation from the world and continual surrender to God.

First, Jesus teaches His followers to be distinct from the world. Separation from the world does not mean retreating from it or avoiding it entirely but rather living in a way that looks radically different. Scripture uses many analogies to illustrate this: Jesus calls us the “light of the world,” the “salt of the earth,” and trees that bear good or bad fruit. We are instructed to live in the world but not to conform to it (e.g., Matthew 5:13–16, John 17:15–18, Romans 12:2). Why are we told to stand out? So that others will take notice and ask questions. When we live holy lives, our differences spark curiosity, inviting others to explore the reason behind our hope and transformation.

The second way we reflect God’s holiness is through surrender. We cannot achieve holiness through our efforts. This is where Christianity diverges from every other religion. Most religions teach you to clean yourself up or prove your worth to be acceptable to the gods. Only then will you earn their favor. But not so with Jesus. In Christ, we surrender—not to make ourselves holy, but to allow Him to make us holy. Holiness begins and ends with Him. Consider what the apostle John says:

WE LOVE BECAUSE HE FIRST LOVED US. 1 JOHN 4:19 ESV

John says that our love for others is not based on our holiness but on the reality that God first loved us. God demonstrated this love by sending His only Son and offering us salvation as a gift (John 3:16). We do not have to earn it; we need to receive it. How do we do that? By making Christ King in our hearts. Consider what Paul wrote to the church in Rome:

**BECAUSE, IF YOU CONFESS WITH YOUR MOUTH THAT JESUS IS LORD
AND BELIEVE IN YOUR HEART THAT GOD RAISED HIM FROM THE DEAD,
YOU WILL BE SAVED. FOR WITH THE HEART ONE BELIEVES AND IS
JUSTIFIED, AND WITH THE MOUTH ONE CONFESSES AND IS SAVED.
ROMANS 10:9-10 ESV**

I always explain to people that our primary life choice is between “God” and “not God.” While that might seem overly simplistic, it captures the heart of what Paul teaches in Romans 10. Paul emphasizes that Jesus must be the Lord of our lives, which should be evident both in the declaration of our mouths and in a life that

reflects Him. The posture of our hearts in simple faith is what saves us.

I realize this topic is weighty and do not mean to treat it lightly. But I do know this: everyone on earth who has sincerely sought and trusted God to be King over their hearts will not be denied a seat in heaven. The primary point is to recognize that only God can save you. All you must do is surrender control.

SURRENDER -THE PATH TO HOLINESS

Surrender is the pathway to holiness. One of my favorite songs of all time is “I Surrender” by Hillsong Worship³⁷. The bridge says, “*Like a rushing wind, Jesus breathe within, Lord have Your way, Lord have Your way in me.*” This lyric captures the essence of how we pursue holiness. It is not through striving that holiness is achieved but through surrender. That is not to say there is never a place for effort in overcoming sin; personal grit can play a role. But ultimately, our ability to conquer sin comes through the overwhelming power of God’s presence, not our willpower. There is no room for anything else when we allow God to fill us. As we fill our hearts and lives with Him, the chains of sin fall away—not because of our striving but because we are consumed with God’s majesty, joy, and peace.

So, how do we surrender? We have already discussed the spiritual disciplines: seeking God in prayer, meditating on His Word, engaging in personal and corporate worship, and practicing generosity. These practices help fill our lives with more of God as we surrender our hearts to Him. In marriage, husbands must take the lead in these areas—not just for ourselves but also for our spouses and families.

Why is surrender to God necessary in marriage? We need to remember marriage’s function. God designed marriage to accomplish something: it reflects God’s glory toward the world. A marriage’s Kingdom impact is directly tied to the degree to which both individuals align with God’s will through personal surrender. Paul explains this principle to Timothy:

NOW IN A GREAT HOUSE THERE ARE NOT ONLY VESSELS OF GOLD AND SILVER BUT ALSO OF WOOD AND CLAY, SOME FOR HONORABLE USE, SOME FOR DISHONORABLE. THEREFORE, IF ANYONE CLEANSSES HIMSELF FROM WHAT IS DISHONORABLE, HE WILL BE A VESSEL FOR HONORABLE USE, SET APART AS HOLY, USEFUL TO THE MASTER OF

THE HOUSE, READY FOR EVERY GOOD WORK. 2 TIMOTHY 2:20-21 ESV

Paul clarifies that the cleaner (or holier) we are, the more valuable we become for God's purposes. Holiness makes us ready to be used by Him for every suitable work. A person pursuing holiness is less entangled in the world and more focused on eternal treasures. This same idea is echoed in the book of Hebrews:

STRIVE FOR PEACE WITH EVERYONE, AND FOR THE HOLINESS

WITHOUT WHICH NO ONE WILL SEE THE LORD. HEBREWS 12:14 ESV

Holiness, then, is not just about personal purity—it is about pointing others to God. When we set ourselves apart for God in holy surrender, our lives reflect Him, drawing others to His glory.

However, this does not mean we pursue holiness to achieve what the world might consider a “grand purpose.” God does not measure greatness the way we do. Holiness is not about purifying ourselves to gain a bigger platform, more wealth, or other earthly rewards. Instead, it is about being available for God to use us in ways that build eternal treasure. Some people who appear the least significant by the world's standards will be magnificently rewarded in heaven simply because they allowed God to use them in ways we might overlook.

I also do not intend to diminish visible acts like preaching a powerful sermon, leading a large charity, or giving generously to God's Kingdom. These are excellent examples of faith in action. But they are built on the foundation of millions of Christians looking to honor Christ in small, everyday ways that may go unnoticed by the world. These small acts—personal thoughtfulness, kindness, encouragement, and quiet acts of service—are immensely valued by God. Holiness begins in these moments of daily surrender, readying us to reflect His glory to those around us, starting with our wives.

Being in a posture of surrender allows God to use us effectively, moment by moment, to share His love and glory. In marriage, this begins with how we treat and serve our spouse. Let surrender to God be the starting point for holiness in your life and marriage.

MINDSET

BELIEF 1: LEADING MY WIFE IN HOLINESS IS MY RESPONSIBILITY.

You must first believe that it is your responsibility to lead your wife. One function of marriage is sanctifying its participants, and God designed the husband to lead this process (Ephesians 5:25-26). He represents Christ in the relationship, and just as Christ loves and leads the Church toward holiness, husbands are to love and lead their wives toward holiness.

I will never forget a small group I attended as a young man. As we discussed this role of a husband, a few men were shocked at the idea that this responsibility rested on their shoulders. They spent over an hour arguing against it, making excuse after excuse: “I’m not equipped to lead,” “I do not know enough about the Bible,” or “My wife is just better at that stuff.”

If you are going to succeed, you must believe and understand that this is your God-given responsibility. Otherwise, you will find every excuse to avoid it. Excuses will not hold weight when you stand before the throne of God. We are responsible because God says we are and will hold us accountable for the spiritual condition of our hearts, marriages, and families.

BELIEF 2: I DO NOT SANCTIFY MY WIFE; THE HOLY SPIRIT DOES.

The Holy Spirit is the One who sanctifies and transforms us (1 Corinthians 6:11). He is the One who changes your wife’s heart. At this point, you might feel confused. How can the husband be responsible for leading in holiness without being the one to affect change? The answer lies in God’s choice to work in partnership with humanity. Husbands participate in sanctifying their wives, but the actual transformation comes from the Holy Spirit. God uses the example set by a husband to inspire and guide his wife.

However, trying to “fix” your wife’s spirituality or moral compass through direct intervention is often disastrous. There are moments when this is proper, but frequently, it becomes a matter of seeing her speck while ignoring your log (Matthew 7:3). When I have pointed out what I perceived as a moral failing in my wife, it came from a posture of pride instead of humility. I was less concerned with her well-being and more about conforming her to my image. See the problem? This attitude makes it

about me and not authentic healing. Even if my observation is correct, this approach does not work because I place myself above her.

Jesus did not correct people this way. His harshest words were reserved for the Pharisees and teachers of the law—those who were prideful hypocrites and frauds. They spent much time pointing out everyone else’s faults rather than dealing with themselves.

Jesus led by example, calling everyone to holiness by earnestly seeking the Father and serving others. In the same way, we lead in holiness by boldly pursuing God and humbly serving our wives. God designed women to submit to their husbands within the context of marriage. They are predisposed to receive from their husbands, which means that when you lead by example, they naturally want to follow.

You must, therefore, authentically live the kind of life you want her to follow. This requires intentional steps to improve yourself. You must be the first to show real, visible change that is significant enough to make your wife notice. This is not about perfection but about progress that reflects God’s work in you. By setting the example, you invite your wife to follow you on the journey toward holiness.

Finally, be open to the possibility that your interpretation of how God wants you to act may be incorrect. It is possible that the “shortcoming” you noticed in your wife is not one at all. As aligned as two people can become in an intimate marriage, they will still have many disagreements, which is fine. What matters is that you are both seeking God and spurring one another toward a deeper relationship with Him.

WORDS OF LIFE

WORD OF LIFE 1: YOU ARE A DEARLY BELOVED CHILD OF GOD. HE SEES YOU, KNOWS YOU, AND WANTS TO WALK WITH YOU DAILY. YOU BELONG TO HIM, WHICH MAKES YOU PRICELESS BEYOND IMAGINATION.

One of my favorite movies is Kingdom of Heaven. It is not because of a masterful storyline but rather its moral questioning and compelling characters—each wrestling with their conscience while trying to navigate the world. Toward the end of the movie, the main character, Balian, leads the defense of Jerusalem. In a pivotal moment, he knights every man in the city. A priest, portrayed as the embodiment

of religious hypocrisy, sarcastically asks, “Does making a man a knight make him a better fighter?” To this, Balian confidently replies, “Yes! Yes, it does.”

This scene underscores a profound truth: how we see ourselves affects what we can achieve. People rarely rise above the limitations they impose on themselves. This mindset reveals itself in phrases like “I could never...” or “I’m not smart enough to...” Such beliefs create boundaries that prevent people from trying anything beyond their perceived limitations.

Understanding our identity is so vital that God, on several occasions, gave people new names to reflect their transformation. Simon became Peter. Abram became Abraham. Jacob became Israel. In each instance, the name change signified a personal transformation—who they were and who God was shaping them to be.

This principle applies to your wife as well. She has the potential to be a powerhouse, a force to be reckoned with. As a child of God, she is protected by His hand and empowered by His Spirit. As a woman, she brings unique strengths and perspectives—gifts that complement you in ways you could never carry out on your own. Her abilities are God-given and invaluable. Be intentional in reminding her of these truths.

WORD OF LIFE 2: I LOVE TALKING WITH YOU ABOUT GOD. YOUR THOUGHTS ARE VALUABLE TO ME BECAUSE THEY DIFFER FROM MINE. YOUR PERSPECTIVE EDIFIES MY PURSUIT OF GOD.

Your wife brings a unique perspective to your understanding of God because she represents His image in a way you do not. Speaking words like this over her communicates that she is welcome to share her thoughts and that she is an equal to you. She needs to know that you value what she has to say so that she can bring her full potential to your marriage.

WORD OF LIFE 3: GOD HAS A UNIQUE PURPOSE FOR YOUR LIFE, AND HIS PLANS ARE GOOD. ONLY YOU CAN FULFILL WHAT HE HAS PUT YOU ON EARTH TO DO. YOU ARE VALUABLE BEYOND MEASURE.

This communicates the same truth that governs your life. If God has a sovereign will and a plan for the entire world, then it follows that He has plans for every individual. Your wife has a unique purpose that only she can fulfill. Remind her of her glorious

purpose and value to you and God.

WORD OF LIFE 4: I WANT TO HEAR YOUR PRAYERS TO GOD SO I CAN JOIN IN.

These words of life communicate that you value her communion with God and want to hear and be a part of it. It is also a terrific way to listen to what is on her heart, what concerns her in the current season, or what she is praising and thanking God for.

ACTIONS

ACTION 1: LEAD IN THE SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES.

Your wife cannot reflect what you do not demonstrate. If God designed a wife to submit and receive from her husband, then what she sees in you will naturally influence her response. This does not absolve women of their responsibility to follow Christ. Still, it does highlight the natural relationship God designed—a dynamic in which a wife is inclined to follow her husband's lead.

If you read your Bible and pray, she is more likely to develop that habit. If you take the initiative to rally the family for church on Sunday, she is more likely to help get everyone ready. Your actions set the tone for your household. Take intentional steps toward greater surrender and sanctification for your spiritual growth and as a model for your wife. Lead with consistency and faithfulness, trusting God to use your example to inspire and encourage her walk with Him.

ACTION 2: PRAY OVER YOUR WIFE.

One of the easiest things to do daily is pray for your wife. Right before bed, I say a prayer like, "God, I thank you for my precious wife, and I pray that you help her sleep, heal her body, and give her renewed strength for tomorrow. Dwell with us and grant us peace and joy as we rest in your presence. Amen." It is so simple and yet so profound. How you talk about her before God is what she will start to believe about herself. Call her precious and beautiful, and thank God that she is in your life. You are saying, "I love you," without directly saying it. She will notice the sincerity of your prayer and grow in confidence and assurance of your love for her. Moreover, you invite God into your marriage every day when you do this. This open invitation is an action of surrender to God's will in your life.

ACTION 3: INVITE YOUR WIFE TO PRAY FOR YOU.

This action helps you lead in multiple ways. First, you are telling your wife that her prayers matter and are valuable to you. Second, it helps her grow in her prayer life by getting her more comfortable with praying aloud. Third, it invites God to work in your life as you agree in prayer with her. Finally, it lets you hear your wife's heart and concern for you, which can be encouraging.

ACTION 4: TALK ABOUT GOD AND HIS KINGDOM WITH YOUR WIFE.

Talking together about the character and awesomeness of God can be an incredibly edifying activity. Remember, you both offer perspectives that you are unlikely to consider independently. Take her opinions seriously and consider them so that you might be edified. Offer your thoughts back to her. A word of caution here, however. Disagreement is inevitable between any two thinking people, and you must learn to disagree agreeably. Even in the best marriages, the husband and wife have drastically different opinions on some things. Do not allow your talks about God and His Kingdom to degrade into an argument. It should be fun and exploratory, with an understanding that you will sometimes disagree, and that is fine.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

As in every other area of life, God calls you to lead your wife in holiness. This is not a passive stance—waiting idly for growth to happen—but an active pursuit of the things of God. We must be men who recognize that our responsibility extends beyond providing for our wives physically; we are also called to shepherd their spiritual well-being. Your wife needs God desperately. You cannot force her to chase after Him, but you can set the pace—allowing her to run in your slipstream as you pursue Him wholeheartedly.

Holiness is not achieved through sheer effort but through surrender—yielding to God's will and allowing the Holy Spirit to transform us. This means setting ourselves apart from the world and consistently submitting to God's refining work. Forget the fleeting promises of this world—they offer nothing but sorrow, sickness, and death. Instead, invite God to complete His work in you and let your wife witness the transformation.

But hear this clearly: do not shame or coerce her. Such tactics are unnecessary when

you serve the all-powerful God. He knows how to reach her heart. Your role is to faithfully seek Him, trusting that His work in you will inspire and encourage her.

A husband and wife united in a shared pursuit of holiness—committed to growing in Christ and advancing His Kingdom—become an unstoppable force for God's glory. You cannot even begin to fathom what He can accomplish through your marriage. So never waver in your pursuit of Him, because the reward is always worth the effort.

Chapter Nine

Do Justice: Seek Equality

THERE IS NEITHER JEW NOR GREEK, THERE IS NEITHER SLAVE NOR FREE, THERE IS NO MALE AND FEMALE, FOR YOU ARE ALL ONE IN CHRIST JESUS. GALATIANS 3:28 ESV

Women are equal to men. Most of us would readily agree with that statement—but do we truly embrace it in our hearts and actions? Thankfully, we live in a time when women are legally recognized as equal to men, with the same rights and opportunities. This wasn't always the case, and we should be thankful for how far we've come in valuing women more fully in society.

Yet I find myself wondering—how does this equality play out in our marriages? Do we, as husbands, consistently treat our wives as equals in intellect, capability, and worth?

Over the years, in countless conversations with men, I've noticed a pattern. Many times, when men talk about their wives, there's a light-hearted comment about how they don't understand her, or how she's "crazy." These jokes are usually harmless, a playful way to highlight the differences between men and women. But sometimes, beneath the humor, I've sensed something more—a quiet undercurrent of frustration or disregard that can slowly erode respect.

One of the things I deeply admire about my wife is the way she honors me, especially in front of others. She doesn't speak negatively about me in public, even when she might feel frustrated. She protects my character and shows me grace—choosing to build me up rather than tear me down. I know there are plenty of things she

could say, but she holds back out of love and respect. And that example reminds me of how important it is for both spouses to honor one another, especially when we see each other as truly worthy of that honor.

MEANING AND PURPOSE

Looking back over history, the undeniable trend in every culture has been the domination of men over women. What has happened with women in the West over the last couple of centuries has been nothing short of a miracle, a remarkable change in their social posture that is the exception, not the rule. Why has this been the case? Because of the consequences of the fall of man.

**TO THE WOMAN HE SAID, "I WILL SURELY MULTIPLY YOUR PAIN IN
CHILDBEARING; IN PAIN YOU SHALL BRING FORTH CHILDREN. YOUR
DESIRE SHALL BE CONTRARY TO YOUR HUSBAND, BUT HE SHALL RULE
OVER YOU." GENESIS 3:16 ESV**

In Genesis, God outlines two specific consequences for women because of sin. The first is pain in childbirth. Women can carry and bring life into the world—a remarkable and God-given “superpower.” Yet, because of sin, this incredible gift is accompanied by intense physical pain.

The second consequence is a natural enmity between husband and wife, where both strive for dominance, but the man ultimately prevails. Why does the man prevail? Historically, it has been primarily because he is physically stronger. Instead of using this strength to protect and cherish his wife, he often abuses it, exerting control over her in ways that distort the loving partnership God intended. This has tragically defined the plight of women throughout much of human history.

It is crucial to understand that these circumstances are not God’s ideal but the consequences of sin. God’s statements here are descriptive, not prescriptive. They do not reflect His design for how relationships should be, but rather the brokenness introduced by the fall. These consequences are part of the curse of sin—the very curse that Jesus came to liberate us from.

Jesus’ ministry shows His active work to redeem and restore women from the effects of the fall. In every interaction He had with women, Jesus elevated them,

challenging cultural norms and affirming their equal value and dignity. Consider the following examples:

- **Mary the Mother of Jesus:** Jesus was born of woman, coming into the world not through male agency but by God's direct action (Galatians 4:4).
- **The Samaritan Woman:** Jesus engages in a theological conversation with a Samaritan woman at the well, breaking social norms by speaking publicly with both a woman and a Samaritan. He offers her living water, a spiritual gift, and reveals His identity as the Messiah to her (John 4:1–42).
- **Mary of Bethany:** Jesus affirms Mary's choice to sit at His feet and learn—traditionally reserved for male disciples. He commends her desire for spiritual knowledge over the societal expectations placed on her as a woman (Luke 10:38–42).
- **The Bleeding Woman:** A woman suffering from a chronic bleeding disorder touches Jesus' garment in faith and is healed. Jesus not only heals her but publicly affirms her faith, addressing her as “daughter,” a term of endearment and dignity (Mark 5:25–34; Luke 8:43–48).
- **The Sinful Woman:** A woman anoints Jesus' feet with perfume and tears, and He defends her act of devotion against the judgmental attitudes of others. He forgives her sins and elevates her by emphasizing her faith and repentance (Luke 7:36–50).
- **The Resurrection Witnesses:** Women, including Mary Magdalene, are the first to witness and proclaim Jesus' resurrection. This is astounding, as Jesus entrusted women with the foundational message of Christianity, countering cultural norms that dismissed women's testimony (Matthew 28:1–10; Mark 16:1–11; Luke 24:1–12; John 20:1–18).

Through these interactions, Jesus consistently demonstrates a commitment to treating women with dignity, compassion, and equality, directly challenging the effects of sin and cultural norms that marginalized them.

As husbands, we have a role in helping our wives realize the freedom and equality

that Jesus offers. This includes honoring them, respecting their perspectives, and cherishing their God-given value. In doing so, we reflect Christ's love and contribute to restoring God's intended design for marriage and relationships.

MINDSET

BELIEF 1: EVEN IF I DO NOT FULLY UNDERSTAND WHY, MY WIFE'S PERSPECTIVES ARE VALUABLE.

It is too easy for a man to fall into the trap of dismissing his wife's perspectives or choices as irrational. Take, for example, the amusing but familiar debate over household throw pillows. Husbands often struggle to understand why a single surface needs so many pillows—let alone why they seem to multiply over time. Before enjoying the couch or bed, you must remove a small mountain of pillows, which frustrates many men.

From a man's perspective, throw pillows are neither functional nor necessary. Most are too small or textured to be comfortable, and no one "needs" dozens of them. However, what many husbands miss is that their wives' assessment of the pillows' value is not based on function but on aesthetics—on creating a visually pleasing, attractive space.

Here is the irony: Men often dismiss this as silly until the decorations are something they care about, such as hanging swords, hunting trophies, or sports memorabilia. Men are not against aesthetics; they are more accepting of it when it aligns with their interests.

This lighthearted example reveals something deeper: Husbands can quickly dismiss their wives' thoughts as unimportant or irrational, only to realize later they had a valid point all along. The real issue is not her perspective but our tendency as men to judge her values and problem-solving methods as foreign or irrelevant simply because they differ from ours. Over time, this mindset becomes a slow poison, eroding respect and trust in the relationship.

If you habitually label your wife's thoughts as irrational or "crazy," she will eventually respond in one of three ways:

- 1. Belief and withdrawal:** She may start to believe your dismissiveness and

withdraw, ceasing to share her thoughts. In doing so, you lose one of the greatest blessings God intended for you in a wife—a helper who reflects His image alongside you.

- 2. Resentment and bitterness:** She may grow bitter, feeling unheard and undervalued. This bitterness can lead her to act independently of you, undermining your unity as a couple.
- 3. Haughtiness and disdain:** She may mirror your pride, elevating her thoughts above yours. Over time, she may view you as irrational, leading to disdain and a lack of mutual respect.

Each outcome is destructive, and many men do not recognize their role in fostering them by undervaluing their wives' minds.

What does scripture teach us about our wife's counsel? It paints a pretty different picture of a godly woman:

**SHE OPENS HER MOUTH WITH WISDOM, AND THE TEACHING OF
KINDNESS IS ON HER TONGUE. PROVERBS 31:26**

The Bible affirms that the words of a righteous woman are wise. If your wife has given her heart to Christ and seeks Him sincerely, she grows in wisdom. To disregard her counsel is to place yourself at a disadvantage.

Let me be clear: valuing your wife's counsel is not about appeasing her to attain peace or using flattery to gain something in return. She will see through any shallow attempts to manipulate her. Respecting your wife's mind is about authentically believing in her God-given value and wisdom.

This does not mean your wife's opinions will always be correct, but it does mean they are always worth considering. In my experience, I have never regretted listening to my wife's perspective. Often, her insights challenge me to consider factors that seem foreign or irrelevant at first but later prove essential. Over time, I have seen how deeply her input improves my thinking.

Husbands, give your wife the respect she deserves by treating her thoughts, desires, and input as equally valuable to your own. This requires conscious effort, humility,

and time, but the rewards—a stronger marriage, mutual respect, and a deeper understanding of God’s design—are worth it.

BELIEF 2: MY WIFE’S ROLE IS VALUABLE BEYOND MEASURE.

Women are far more likely than men to choose the role of homemaker. Women have worked within the home for thousands of years, managing households and raising children. This tradition does not simply disappear because modern society increasingly encourages women to pursue careers.

This is not to say that pursuing a career is wrong—indeed, many women will find fulfillment and happiness on that path. However, that is not the road all women should take because it is more probable they will find deep satisfaction in the traditional roles of wife, mother, and homemaker. Women who want to take that path should be encouraged to do so! Unfortunately, our society devalues these roles, even making women feel guilty about not contributing to household finances with their earnings.

Many husbands devalue these traditional roles, sometimes subtly but devastatingly. For example, when a husband is the primary income earner, he may communicate—intentionally or not—that the money he earns is his rather than a shared resource for the marriage.

This attitude can erode marital unity because it communicates that love is conditional and belittles women’s traditional roles. First, refusing to share resources implies that a husband’s provision is contingent on his wife pleasing him. This unspoken message, “This is my money, and you only benefit from it if you meet my expectations,” creates resentment and diminishes her dignity.

Second, treating income as the ultimate measure of contribution devalues her choice to be a homemaker. Managing a home is a role women have played for thousands of years, and it requires tremendous skill and effort. Have you ever tried to manage your home for a week? I am not talking about just “getting by.” I mean genuinely managing—raising children, planning meals, cooking, cleaning, organizing, restoring order, and mentally shifting from task to task every five minutes. I have done this in short bursts, and let me tell you, it is exhausting.

We need men who honor their wives for choosing a traditional role. Income does not equate to value in a family. A wise husband ensures his wife feels appreciated for her contributions, and here is why:

It fosters biblical submission and mutual respect: When a husband diminishes his wife's role, he fuels the temptation for her to dominate or overtake him. This dynamic reflects the curse in Genesis 3:16, where God warns that sin will result in a struggle for dominance between husband and wife. However, this natural response to male domination can be corrected when men genuinely honor their wives for the vital roles they play in marriage, the home, and society. When a wife feels respected and valued, she is more willing to embrace her God-given role and support her husband's leadership. Honor and respect create an environment of mutual submission and love, as outlined in Ephesians 5.

It unlocks her and your marriage's full potential: Women are often drawn to traditional roles because they align with their natural femininity. When a husband devalues these roles, he also devalues his wife's femininity, which is an essential complement to masculinity. Women reflect a unique aspect of God's image, and not honoring that aspect means missing the fullness of what God intended in marriage.

For example, my wife has an eye for aesthetics that I initially dismissed as frivolous. I could not see the functional value in many of her efforts. However, over time, I came to appreciate the beauty she brought to our home—a beauty that creates peace and comfort for everyone who enters. My wife's contributions in this area have enriched our house and made it a place of rest and peace, something I now deeply value.

If you want to unlock the full potential of your marriage, start by honoring your wife and her role. Thank her regularly for her contributions, big or small. Recognize the incredible value she brings to your life, home, and family.

BELIEF 3: MY WIFE IS CAPABLE OF ASTOUNDING FEATS IN CHRIST.

Every believer has the potential to carry out extraordinary things for God's Kingdom, and your wife is no exception. Regardless of how you view her talents or abilities, God can take and use what she offers. Think of how Jesus fed thousands with just a few loaves and fish. He can do the same with the gifts and strengths your wife

brings to Him.

Throughout Scripture, God uses people who seem weak or unqualified to achieve incredible things. Gideon, who hid in fear, was addressed as a “mighty warrior,” leading Israel to victory. David, a young shepherd, defeated Goliath. Peter, who denied Jesus three times, preached at Pentecost and led thousands to salvation. These stories remind us that God does not look at our qualifications but our willingness to trust Him.

This truth applies to your wife—and all of us. Our limitations can lead us to underestimate what we or others—including our spouses—are capable of. Often, the problem is placing arbitrary limitations on ourselves or those we love.

If you have ever dismissed your wife’s goals or dreams, it is time to rethink that position—especially if two key criteria are met:

1. Her goal looks to honor Christ.
2. Her goal does not conflict with God’s Word.

Have you discouraged your wife’s aspirations? Have you doubted her ability to lead or achieve something meaningful?

I faced this challenge when my wife approached me about starting a photography business. At first, I was terrified. The upfront costs were high, and she already had a stable job with a good income. Why take the risk? But my wife saw a future that aligned with her strengths and passions. She envisioned blessing others through photography while creating a flexible career that might one day allow her to stay home with children.

Initially, I resisted, but as we prayed and sought God’s wisdom, I realized I needed to support her. It was not easy. We had no guarantees of success, and the risks were significant. But together, we created a plan. My dad generously helped as an investor, Nikki took photography classes, and I studied small business management. Bit by bit, we moved forward in faith.

The result? Shortly after my wife quit her job, we found out she was pregnant—after five years of trying. It was an answer to prayer, but it also brought challenges.

Morning sickness made it difficult for her to market her business actively. Yet, God provided. She found her first clients, and over time, the company generated the income we needed to survive and thrive. I do not doubt that God took and multiplied what she brought Him.

As husbands, we should be our wives' greatest encouragers and supporters. This often boils down to a question of trust: Do we genuinely believe God can use our wives to accomplish extraordinary things?

The correct answer is yes! Whether her achievements are public or private, big or small, we should praise and admire her for every step forward. Greatness in God's Kingdom is not measured by worldly standards but by faithfulness and a willingness to trust Him.

Your wife is capable of astounding feats in Christ. Support her, encourage her, and trust God with the results. You will strengthen your marriage and help her realize the full potential God has placed within her.

WORDS OF LIFE

WORD OF LIFE 1: GOD HAS GRANTED YOU KNOWLEDGE AND WAYS OF THINKING I CANNOT HOPE TO ATTAIN. YOU ARE SMARTER THAN YOU REALIZE, AND EVEN IF I DO NOT ALWAYS APPRECIATE IT, YOUR PERSPECTIVES ARE VALUABLE TO ME. PLEASE ALWAYS SHARE YOUR THOUGHTS WITH ME, EVEN IF THEY FRUSTRATE ME.

This message is powerful, especially when your wife feels excluded from decisions or unappreciated in your shared efforts. Coordinating with your wife can sometimes be challenging because women often think differently than men. These differences can lead to tension, stress, or even arguments when disagreeing.

When that happens, take a moment to pause, breathe, apologize if necessary, and speak these words of life to her. They affirm that you value her input, even when difficult, and invite her to continue sharing her thoughts. Doing so builds her confidence in knowing that her voice matters to you.

Trust me, involving your wife in life's decisions and challenges is worth the effort. While it requires patience and intentionality, the more you work toward shared

solutions, the easier it becomes. Her complementary perspective will strengthen and improve you in everything you do together.

WORD OF LIFE 2: THANK YOU FOR EVERYTHING YOU DO FOR ME AND OUR FAMILY. YOUR WORK MANAGING OUR HOME AND FAMILY IS NOTHING SHORT OF A SUPERPOWER. PLEASE KNOW I APPRECIATE IT AND WANT TO HELP YOU. CAN I DO SOMETHING THIS WEEK TO MAKE YOUR LIFE EASIER?

These words serve a dual purpose. First, they affirm your wife's immense value and let her know that her work does not go unnoticed. A wife who feels well-esteemed by her husband often finds more contentment in his praise than in any societal affirmation.

Second, they allow you to share in her burdens. While women are often better at managing domestic affairs, it is vital to recognize the immense cognitive and physical load this requires, especially if she is also working outside the home.

Your wife constantly balances tasks, thinks ahead about the dozens of things that need to be done, and stewards the emotional atmosphere of the home to ensure everyone's joy and well-being. This is exhausting, and it is not her responsibility alone.

Take the initiative to observe her routines and step in without being asked. Offer to take over some of her tasks and follow through consistently. This is especially vital if you feel that your wife does not have time to give you the love or attention you deserve. While you deserve her love and prioritization, she will find it far easier to provide when you prioritize her first by lightening her load.

One word of caution—be mindful to follow her preferred way of doing things if she has one. Sometimes, well-intentioned “help” can actually add to her burden if it's not done the way she prefers.

WORD OF LIFE 3: GOD HAS CREATED YOU MORE CAPABLE THAN YOU REALIZE. YOU CAN ACHIEVE WHAT YOU SET YOUR MIND TO BECAUSE HE IS LEADING YOU. I BELIEVE IN WHAT HE CAN CARRY OUT THROUGH YOU.

Like us, our wives need courage to step into the areas where God calls them. Whether it is ministry, service, motherhood, friendships, or a career, answering God's call

can feel daunting—especially when it involves uncharted territory.

Be a steady source of refuge and encouragement for your wife. Remind her of God's potential within her and affirm your belief in what He can accomplish through her. Your support can propel her toward God's unique purposes for her life, bringing blessings to her, your marriage, and your family.

As one flesh, your wife's success is also yours. Supporting her in pursuing God's calling is part of fulfilling your own. Her dreams and desires are equally important as yours, so take them seriously. Pay attention to how her goals evolve and help her take the next steps forward.

Every wife deserves a husband who is her rock—a steady and supportive partner who empowers her to flourish. Loving her in this way fulfills God's command to love your wife as yourself (Ephesians 5:28-29). Her future is your future. Invest in her, and together, you will reflect the fullness of God's plan for marriage.

ACTIONS

ACTION 1: NEVER DEFAME YOUR WIFE.

One of the most impactful commitments you can make as a husband is never defaming your wife. Never speak with the intent of belittling or criticizing her to others. A godly man should praise his wife, focusing on her strengths and speaking well of her in every situation. Even if there is only one thing you can genuinely appreciate, that is what you highlight.

Your role is to be her defender and champion—not the one undermining her in front of others. If you need advice about your marriage, it is appropriate to seek help, but that should only happen in private, one-on-one conversations with someone wise and trustworthy who can guide you toward solutions.

Consider how devastating it would be to feel defamed by your spouse. Thankfully, my wife has never done this to me, but if she had, I would feel small, unvalued, and betrayed. Do not let your wife experience that. Your wife is a treasure; you should reflect that in how you talk about her.

This helps your marriage as much as it does her. Express this loyalty, and she will

likely reciprocate with the same devotion. We must revive the kind of honor that protects a spouse's dignity at all costs. Be the husband who guards her honor and let nothing stand in the way of that commitment.

ACTION 2: TAKE THE INITIATIVE TO LEARN ABOUT HER DESIRES AND STEP TOWARD THEM.

Even if you cannot act immediately, showing genuine interest in your wife's dreams shows love and care. Talking with her about her goals and aspirations communicates that her happiness and role in shaping your future are important to you.

Take a small, practical step to help bring her dream closer to reality. For example, one of my wife's dreams is to own a property with a glass greenhouse where she can host small weddings. I do not have the financial resources to make that happen, but I can still meaningfully engage her.

I could help her write down plans, estimate costs, research potential properties, and brainstorm ways to achieve this goal. While I could dismiss the idea as impossible, taking her seriously and helping her think through the steps shows respect for her vision and faith in God's ability to work through us.

Remember, proximity is not random. Your wife is your wife for a reason, and you have a unique role in helping her fulfill God's purposes. Whether through significant actions or small steps, your support can be the catalyst God uses to make her dreams—and your shared future—a reality.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

As we close this chapter, I want you to take away two essential truths.

First, your wife is your equal and complement. Her thoughts are just as valuable as yours, no matter how different—or even crazy—they may seem to you. She is wired to think differently, and that is by God's design.

Second, ignoring your wife's counsel harms you and limits your impact. You are far more powerful and effective when you bring your wife into the decision-making process, because she reflects aspects of God's character that may not come naturally to you. Do not let stubborn pride keep you from this vital resource. I've made this

mistake too many times to count, and I can assure you—respecting your wife is a far better path.

With that in mind, I want you to make two commitments:

1. **Never defame your wife.** As a man, you understand the weight of personal honor and respect. It cuts deep when someone—especially your wife—speaks ill of you to others. Why, then, would you do the same to her?
2. **Never belittle your wife in any way.** Whether it is her body, her mind, or her abilities you feel tempted to criticize, do yourself a favor—keep your mouth shut. God is watching how you either build up or tear down your wife. His desire is for you to strengthen her, helping her grow in confidence, wisdom, and capability. Harsh words do real damage—to her self-esteem and to your relationship. Being angry, jealous, or frustrated is no excuse. She is a daughter of the King, and He will defend her. As a father of three daughters, let me give you this warning: do not mistreat the Lord's daughter, because He will not fail to hold you accountable.

The bottom line? As husbands, we are called to uplift our wives—not only because it is right, but because it reflects the very nature of God's Kingdom. From the very beginning, humanity was meant to rule in partnership with Him and with one another. Scripture teaches that our wives are not just companions but co-heirs of God's grace (1 Peter 3:7). Jesus Himself exemplified this, breaking cultural norms to honor and elevate women, affirming their worth and dignity.

Let that inspire you to follow His example in your marriage. Value your wife's perspective. Appreciate her role. Support her God-given dreams and aspirations. Be the kind of husband who embodies the biblical vision of love, respect, and unity—ensuring that your actions reflect the immeasurable worth of the woman God has entrusted to you.

Chapter Ten

Do Justice: Love as Christ Loves

I love the popular show *The Chosen*³⁸. It focuses on the lives of those who participated in Jesus' earthly ministry. One memorable episode is set during the early days of Jesus' ministry as His influence grows. Most of the episode centers on camp life and what it might have been like to follow Jesus. The disciples, a group with diverse backgrounds and personalities, often clash. They bicker over why they are there, what Jesus' mission is, how best to serve Him, and what they should do next. There is even animosity toward Matthew, a former tax collector, as some disciples struggle to accept him.

While the disciples argue, Jesus is away from the camp, ministering to a lengthy line of people seeking Him. As they grumble about security, exhaustion, and Jesus' unending work, they hope He will return soon. But Jesus does not return until late into the night. When He finally arrives, the disciples are still bickering, but Jesus silences them—not by His words, but by His appearance. Limping and clearly in great pain after standing all day, Jesus' feet are bloody, and He is so exhausted that He can barely greet the disciples before retreating to His tent. They watch as He struggles to prepare for bed, His body worn from ministering to every person who needed Him.

This episode beautifully illustrates how Jesus loved people and the church. He gave His time, energy, and body for every opportunity to serve those around Him. At every point, Jesus gave Himself for others. This is our example for marriage. Just as

Christ gave Himself up for the church, a husband is to give himself up for his wife.

MEANING AND PURPOSE

In Ephesians 5, Paul gives husbands a command:

**HUSBANDS, LOVE YOUR WIVES, AS CHRIST LOVED THE CHURCH AND
GAVE HIMSELF UP FOR HER, EPHESIANS 5:25 ESV**

Sacrifice, by definition, means giving up something you value for the sake of something even more worthwhile. It always costs something, or it is not truly a sacrifice. When the Lord judged King David for taking a census, David sacrificed a burnt offering to stop the plague devastating Israel. One of David's subjects offered him everything he needed for the sacrifice, including the land for the altar. But David refused, saying, "*I will not offer burnt offerings to the Lord my God that cost me nothing*" (2 Samuel 24:24). David understood that true sacrifice must come at a personal cost to be meaningful.

In marriage, sacrifice works the same way. Self-sacrifice involves laying down something you value to achieve something even more worthwhile. Just as a soldier sacrifices his life, interests, and pursuits to fulfill his duty to his country, a husband must lay down his life to fulfill his duty to his wife.

Sacrifice is a biblical principle that leads to a greater understanding of God's design for the world. It can look foolish to outsiders, but God blesses those who embody it. This principle is also the key to a thriving marriage. A relentless focus on selflessness, though impossible to perfect, transforms relationships. As humans, we naturally struggle to take our eyes off ourselves. Yet God calls us to follow Christ's example of self-sacrifice, even when costly. Peter reinforces this idea in his epistle. Just before giving instructions to husbands and wives, he writes about slaves submitting to their masters—even harsh ones:

**FOR THIS IS A GRACIOUS THING, WHEN, MINDFUL OF GOD, ONE
ENDURES SORROWS WHILE SUFFERING UNJUSTLY. FOR TO THIS YOU
HAVE BEEN CALLED, BECAUSE CHRIST ALSO SUFFERED FOR YOU,
LEAVING YOU AN EXAMPLE, SO THAT YOU MIGHT FOLLOW IN HIS
STEPS. 1 PETER 2:19,21 ESV**

Immediately after, Peter addresses husbands, using the phrase “in the same way,” connecting sacrificial love to Christ’s example (1 Peter 3:7). Husbands are to die to themselves daily and root out selfishness in their hearts and minds.

Consider this spectrum: on one end is complete selfishness, and on the other is complete selflessness. An utterly selfish person approaches marriage solely based on what they can gain—whether it is physical satisfaction, financial stability, or emotional security. Their spouse is merely a means to an end, and the moment their needs are unmet, the relationship is disposable.

In contrast, a perfectly selfless person reflects Christ. They consistently prioritize their spouse’s well-being, comfort, and needs over their own. While no one achieves perfect selflessness, Christians are to strive toward it, knowing grace covers our shortcomings. The goal is a life increasingly characterized by selflessness, not selfishness.

Now, consider your marriage. What is your top complaint about your wife? Is it that she does not meet your physical or emotional needs? Is she not respecting you, cleaning enough, or prioritizing the right things? Whatever it is, trace it back to a belief that your wife is not fulfilling something you expect.

It is true—your wife does have responsibilities in marriage, just as you do. She vowed to lay down her life for you, offering herself physically, emotionally, and spiritually. But understand two things:

1. You have no power to change or control your wife’s heart.
2. Focusing on her shortcomings will only lead you toward selfishness, making you less like Jesus.

Only Christ can transform her heart and mind. You must examine yourself before God with fear and trembling and trust that your example may inspire her (Philippians 2:12).

In marital conflict, spouses often blame each other for their failures. This “*I will change if you change first*” mindset guarantees stagnation and eventual separation. A thriving marriage is not built on keeping score but on sacrificial love.

Does this sound like foolishness? I understand the fear. Sacrificial love can feel

risky. What if your spouse does not reciprocate? What if you are left giving while they only take? These fears, while understandable, are often unfounded in a loving marriage. Your wife did not marry you to exploit you. She loved you once, and that love can rekindle—not through criticism, but through selflessness.

So, when was the last time you genuinely considered your wife's feelings? When did you last reflect on her challenges, joys, or needs? How recently have you invested in improving her life without expecting anything?

MINDSET

BELIEF 1: AS THE HUSBAND, GOD DESIGNED ME TO LEAD THROUGH SELF-SACRIFICE.

As the husband, you are called to lead. God designed your wife to receive from and respond to you. Sacrificing yourself for her creates the conditions for her to do the same. Loving someone is inherently sacrificial because it requires time, resources, mental engagement, physical involvement, and constant attention. It will sometimes feel exhausting, but the effort is worth it.

When you lead in sacrificial love, your wife is more likely to respect, love, support, and prioritize your needs. However, you achieve this outcome through your self-sacrificing example, not by pointing out her flaws or reminding her where she falls short. Instead, you show her what laying down your life for someone else means.

You are to be her provider, protector, defender, shield, encourager, and source of hope, peace, and joy. You should devote a sizable part of your day to thinking about how to love her better. This is your God-given purpose—to love your wife just as Christ loved and sacrificed Himself for the church.

BELIEF 2: SELFLESSNESS IS ESSENTIAL FOR GREATNESS.

In Chapter 5, we discussed how service is connected to greatness. Jesus said, “The greatest among you will be your servant” (Matthew 23:11). In marriage, this means selfless, sacrificial love for your wife.

Being selfless with your wife is the starting point for a blessed life because it shifts your focus away from yourself and toward her needs. This mindset extends naturally to others—your children, parents, siblings, and friends. The more God uses you to

serve others, the greater your life and legacy will be.

BELIEF 3: GOD WILL MEET MY NEEDS AS I FOCUS ON SELFLESSNESS.

Many people's most significant fear of selflessness can be summarized in one question: "What about me?" Modern society encourages us to focus on this question. They tell us, "You have to take care of yourself before you can care for others." While this is true, we often take it to an extreme, justifying relentless self-focus under the guise of self-care.

Ironically, many people might find healing simply by focusing on the needs of others rather than endlessly magnifying their own. The question, "What about me?", often leads to unhappiness—particularly in marriage. The seasons I have been most miserable have been when I have fixated on how my life was not going as expected. This self-focus has always led to resentment, mainly if I focused on how my wife was not meeting my needs.

Let me tell you a secret: this attitude has never improved my marriage. Not once. It leads only to accusations, pressure, and unfair treatment.

If selfishness worsens problems, selflessness can improve them. I have said it before: focus on your wife instead of yourself. The key to doing this is personal faith—not faith in yourself or your wife, but faith in God.

Our ability to obey God's commands depends on trusting His faithfulness. We must believe that God can and will deliver on His promises. Romans 8:28 assures us that "God works all things together for the good of those who love Him." This does not mean life will be free of suffering; Jesus Himself said, "In this world, you will have trouble" (John 16:33). But it does mean that when you look back over your life, you will see how God has brought you "from glory to glory" (2 Corinthians 3:18).

This applies to your marriage. As you lay your life down for your wife, trust that God will meet your needs. The expectations you hold over your wife must disappear because they were never meant to be there in the first place. The purpose of marriage is not personal happiness; happiness and joy are the fruit of pursuing God's purposes for marriage. God—not your spouse—must be your prize and focus.

When God is your prize, He fulfills your needs. Even in a difficult marriage, you can

have joy and peace because God is with you. This will often improve your marriage, as a person pursuing God tends to bring positive change to their spouse. But even if your marriage is still challenging, you can find contentment in the Lord.

BELIEF 4: GOD IS A LOVING FATHER.

Scripture presents God as a loving Father for a reason. He is all-powerful and will one day bring the world to justice and peace. Yet to His children, He is tender and compassionate. As a father of three daughters, I know there is no blessing or measure of love I would withhold from them if it were within my power to provide. My earthly love, flawed and limited, still longs to spoil them. How much more, then, will our perfect, all-wise Father meet the needs of His children?

Jesus reminds us of the following truths:

WHAT FATHER AMONG YOU, IF HIS SON ASKS FOR A FISH, WILL INSTEAD OF A FISH GIVE HIM A SERPENT; OR IF HE ASKS FOR AN EGG, WILL GIVE HIM A SCORPION? IF YOU THEN, WHO ARE EVIL, KNOW HOW TO GIVE GOOD GIFTS TO YOUR CHILDREN, HOW MUCH MORE WILL THE HEAVENLY FATHER GIVE THE HOLY SPIRIT TO THOSE WHO ASK HIM!" LUKE 11:11-13, ESV

THEREFORE DO NOT BE ANXIOUS, SAYING, 'WHAT SHALL WE EAT?' OR 'WHAT SHALL WE DRINK?' OR 'WHAT SHALL WE WEAR?' FOR THE GENTILES SEEK AFTER ALL THESE THINGS, AND YOUR HEAVENLY FATHER KNOWS THAT YOU NEED THEM ALL. BUT SEEK FIRST THE KINGDOM OF GOD AND HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS, AND ALL THESE THINGS WILL BE ADDED TO YOU. MATTHEW 6:31-33, ESV

Trust God to meet your spiritual, mental, and physical desires as you sacrificially love your wife. He is faithful and will sustain you, allowing your selflessness to glorify Him and strengthen your marriage.

WORDS OF LIFE

WORDS OF LIFE 1: NOTHING IS MORE IMPORTANT TO ME THAN YOU. I WILL FAIL AT THIS REPEATEDLY, BUT TODAY, I RECOMMIT MY BODY AND MIND TO LOVE AND SERVE YOU FOR ALL YOUR DAYS.

These words communicate three powerful truths:

1. **She is your highest priority.** By saying this, you affirm that she is the most valuable person in your life. No one and nothing else holds a place of tremendous admiration, affection, and importance.
2. **You acknowledge your need for grace.** This statement admits your human imperfection. You will fail at putting her first every day, but you ask for her grace as you strive to grow. While you cannot achieve perfection, you are committed to aiming for it, trusting God to cover your shortcomings.
3. **You give yourself entirely to her.** These words express your desire to bring your best self into the relationship, offering her your whole being—your body, mind, and heart. You hold nothing back but lay everything down in love and devotion at her feet.

ACTIONS

ACTION 1: WRITE DOWN YOUR WIFE'S SCHEDULE FOR TOMORROW. TRY TO IMAGINE WHAT SHE IS DOING, THINKING, AND FEELING THROUGHOUT EACH PART OF HER DAY. FIND AREAS THAT SEEM BURDENSOME OR STRESSFUL. DO THIS EXERCISE EVERY DAY FOR A WEEK. ONCE YOU HAVE FOUND WAYS TO LIGHTEN HER LOAD, ACT—DO NOT ASK FOR PERMISSION, DO IT.

Action is where sacrifice becomes tangible. While it is easy to talk about selflessness, action is where you feel its cost and where your wife experiences its blessing. Sacrifice is not about grand gestures or one-time heroic moments like those in a superhero movie. It is found in the daily, deliberate effort to understand your wife's routines and ease her burdens, regardless of the cost to yourself, without expecting anything in return. Let us explore an example to illustrate this concept.

A Practical Example: Laundry

Imagine your wife typically handles the laundry but has fallen behind. The natural temptation might be to notice the pile building up and approach her, asking, "Why is there so much dirty laundry?"

This response is unwise for two reasons:

1. It communicates that you have not noticed the broader context of her life.
2. It implies that you expect her to stay on top of the task, adding pressure to an already burdened situation.

Chances are that your wife already knows the laundry is piling up. Pointing it out does not help—it only adds to her frustration. Instead, skip the questions and go straight to action. Gather the laundry and start a load, even if you do not know how (try YouTube). Your small investment of time can have a significant impact.

Now, let us address a common mistake husbands make when taking on this task. When your wife sees you starting the laundry, she will either feel loved and appreciated, or she may feel guilty. If her reaction leans toward guilt, she might interpret your actions as impatience or frustration rather than love.

If this happens, do not let guilt fester. Instead, take the opportunity to speak life-giving words. For example, say something like this:

“I know you usually handle the laundry, but this is not just your responsibility. I have no motive other than to love and serve you and our family. Please let me help. If I am doing something wrong, teach me how to do it as you like.”

These words communicate several vital truths with love:

1. **Recognition and validation.** You acknowledge that she sees laundry as her job, which shows you are paying attention to her thoughts and feelings.
2. **Shared responsibility.** You gently challenge the assumption that laundry is solely her responsibility, emphasizing that it is a shared task. This reinforces that household duties belong to both spouses and should be approached as a team.
3. **Commitment to love and serve.** You reaffirm your love for her and your willingness to set aside your agenda to help with her burdens.
4. **Respect for her preferences.** If she has specific ways she likes things done, asking her to teach you shows humility and a desire to honor her authority over that domain. Listening carefully and following her instructions sets you

up to help even more effectively in the future.

Helping your wife with one task is not enough—it is just the beginning. Service and sacrifice are not one-time events but ongoing commitments. When you discover a way to relieve her burden, make it a habit. Over time, as you see her struggling in other areas, step in and do what you can to help.

Trust me, you will never regret unburdening your wife. When you lighten her load, you create space in her life for rest, joy, peace, and the ability to bless others—including you. While your motivation for service should not be to gain something in return, reciprocal love is often a natural result. As you bless her, she will be freer to bless you in return—which is a good place to be.

This pattern of service mirrors how Jesus loves the church. Jesus gave Himself entirely, not expecting anything in return, yet the church responded with love and devotion. In the same way, sacrificially serving your wife reflects Christ's love, bearing fruit in your marriage and bringing glory to God.

ACTION 2: ANALYZE YOUR LIFE AND TIME.

Take a close look at how you spend your time. Outside of the responsibilities you must handle, find the most significant “time stealers” in your life—activities you use to bless or refresh yourself. Then, eliminate some of these and redirect that time toward blessing your wife.

Spending excessive time on things that do little to edify personal growth, strengthen relationships, or fulfill our purpose on earth is easy. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the average American spends over five hours daily on leisure and sports³⁹. That adds up to 35 hours a week, primarily on entertainment. While unwinding and relaxing are essential for both body and soul, we often take them to an extreme.

The Holy Spirit guides how we should spend our time, though this will look different for everyone. The goal is not to eliminate all personal joys or leisure time. God created these things for our enjoyment in balance with His other blessings. Instead, the challenge is reorienting some of your leisure time toward blessing your wife.

Consider a couple without children, enjoying plenty of free time on the weekends

since neither works. They devote Saturdays to chores, errands, and a date night. Sundays start with church in the morning, followed by individual leisure in the afternoon. The husband enjoys watching sports, while the wife prefers a nap and a walk outdoors. Although this arrangement works well, the wife desires to spend more time with her husband. She has let him enjoy his routine out of love, but the husband can show sacrificial love.

Imagine if, one Sunday, the husband surprises her by joining her for her nap—not necessarily to sleep but to be present. He could hold her, play with her hair, or enjoy her peaceful presence as she rests on his chest. Later, he could surprise her again by joining her for a walk on a nearby trail. Together, they would enjoy nature and meaningful conversation about God, their future, or anything on their hearts.

By sacrificing his favorite activity to spend quality time with his wife, the husband communicates that she is more important than his time. Such gestures can be very meaningful.

When prioritizing your wife over your hobbies, you model Christ's love for the church. Jesus laid down His life for us not to gain something in return but out of pure, sacrificial love. When you give up something you enjoy to bless your wife, the gesture will not be missed by her or the Lord.

FOR GOD IS NOT UNJUST SO AS TO OVERLOOK YOUR WORK AND THE LOVE THAT YOU HAVE SHOWN FOR HIS NAME IN SERVING THE SAINTS, AS YOU STILL DO. HEBREWS 6:10 ESV

ACTION 3: BLESS YOUR WIFE IN A WAY SHE CANNOT SEE OR REWARD YOU.

This action aims to practice loving as Christ loves—not seeking anything in return. Sacrificing or serving to gain your wife's praise or reward makes it about you. True love looks to bless without expecting acknowledgment (Matthew 6:3). This kind of love reflects Christ's example and allows you to experience the joy of knowing your heavenly Father sees your actions and will reward you.

Find a way to bless your wife that she cannot notice or praise you for. For example, if you had plans to play poker with friends, quietly give up the evening and take her

on a date instead—without ever mentioning the conflict.

The purpose here is to train your heart in selfless love, learning to delight in sacrifice for its own sake. Start small and let this habit of quiet service grow in your life. Trust that God, who sees what is done secretly, will not fail to reward your faithfulness.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

For some of you, this may be a tough idea to accept—especially if you feel neglected by your wife. Maybe you're in a season where you can't even remember the last time she went out of her way to love you selflessly. If that's you, I want you to pause for a moment and imagine something: what if, starting tomorrow, your wife became the most thoughtful, selfless person? What would she do for you? How would she show her love? How would that make you feel?

It's easy to get lost in such a daydream—because chances are, there were times in your marriage when she was like that. It felt incredible to be the center of her world, the focus of her affection! Now, think about how you would respond if she did that again. Wouldn't you be moved to give her more of yourself?

Here's what I want you to see: you have the power to start that cycle of love again. The key to healing the real—or perceived—neglect in your marriage is to go above and beyond for her first. Take intentional steps to remind her that she is your whole world. How could she ignore such love? Most likely, she won't. She will be far more inclined to respond in kind than to ignore your efforts or selfishly take them without reciprocating. But even if she doesn't respond the way you hope, God sees and will bless your faithfulness.

This journey requires faith in God's promise that He sees and rewards every sacrifice we make for others (Matthew 10:42). With this faith, we can let go of the fear that we'll be left empty, knowing that our Heavenly Father—who knows our every need—will provide for us as we lay down our lives in love for our wives.

Commit yourself anew to this high calling. Trust that as you give of yourself, you will receive more than you could ever imagine—both in your marriage and in your walk with the Lord.

Chapter Eleven

Love Mercy: Lead in Forgiveness

GOOD SENSE MAKES ONE SLOW TO ANGER, AND IT IS HIS GLORY TO
OVERLOOK AN OFFENSE. PROVERBS 19:11 ESV

Imagine yourself as a young man in the ancient world, the apple of your father's eye. You are the favorite son lavished with love and attention in a household of many brothers. Life is good. Your father gives you a special robe, a symbol of his preferential treatment, and you wear it with pride. You have big dreams—literal ones. These dreams hint at a future where you will have authority over your brothers. Naturally, you share these dreams. But what seems harmless fun to you fuels their growing jealousy.

One day, your father sends you into the fields to check on your brothers. As you approach, their simmering resentment boils over. They seize you, strip you of your treasured robe, and cast you into a pit. You are terrified and confused—these are your brothers, your family! But the worst is yet to come. Out of “mercy,” they decide not to leave you to die. Instead, they sell you as a slave to passing traders. The betrayal cuts deep. You are bound, powerless, and heading toward an unknown future.

You are Joseph, Jacob's son. You cannot see how this tragic event turns into God's plan. All you know is fear, heartbreak, and loss. Yet, as the years unfold, God's hand becomes evident. Through a series of unimaginable trials—including slavery and unjust imprisonment—you rise to a position of prominence, second only to Pharaoh in Egypt. In this role, you save countless lives during a devastating famine, including the brothers who betrayed you.

When your brothers come to Egypt seeking grain, they do not recognize you. But you recognize them. Instead of seeking revenge, you weep, overwhelmed by the grace God has given you to see the bigger picture. When you finally reveal yourself to them, you utter words that resonate across the ages:

**SO JOSEPH SAID TO HIS BROTHERS, “COME NEAR TO ME, PLEASE.”
AND THEY CAME NEAR. AND HE SAID, “I AM YOUR BROTHER, JOSEPH,
WHOM YOU SOLD INTO EGYPT. AND NOW DO NOT BE DISTRESSED OR
ANGRY WITH YOURSELVES BECAUSE YOU SOLD ME HERE, FOR GOD
SENT ME BEFORE YOU TO PRESERVE LIFE.” GENESIS 45:4–5, ESV**

Joseph’s ability to forgive his brothers is extraordinary. He spares and comforts them, encouraging them not to feel guilty about their actions. How did he do this? The key lies in his trust in God’s sovereignty. Joseph understood that God used even the evil intentions of others to carry out His divine purpose.

This story has practical implications for our lives, especially in the context of marriage. Like Joseph, you are part of God’s sovereign plan, which often involves trials and suffering to achieve a greater good. Your marriage is central to this plan—a covenant relationship where forgiveness and grace play a pivotal role. Just as Joseph’s forgiveness brought relief and restoration to his brothers, your willingness to forgive and show mercy to your wife can bring healing and unity to your marriage.

Forgiveness is not easy, especially when the wounds are deep. But Joseph’s story reminds us that forgiveness is not about excusing wrongs but trusting God’s ability to bring good out of even the worst circumstances. As you reflect on Joseph’s journey, may you find the strength to extend grace and mercy in your own life, knowing that God’s plan is at work—even in the most challenging moments.

MEANING AND PURPOSE

Withholding forgiveness is a slow poison that erodes the soul. In marriage, this poison manifests in two distinct ways. First, an individual may cling to a specific hurt caused by their spouse. This often stems from a singular event, such as infidelity, deceit, or verbal abuse. The offense stays unresolved despite the issue being addressed or the couple moving forward. It resurfaces in future conflicts, poisoning

the relationship by introducing tension at unexpected moments. This recurrence harms both individuals and undermines trust.

Second, this poison infiltrates daily interactions. A habitual lack of mercy and grace leads to poor treatment of one's spouse. Over time, the behavior becomes so ingrained that both partners grow numb to its destructive effects. Despite this desensitization, the damage persists. Worse still, the problem becomes visible to others. Men often criticize and demean their wives publicly, seizing every opportunity to humiliate them. The very man entrusted to protect and defend his wife becomes her attacker, eroding the marriage and dishonoring the marital covenant.

Withholding mercy and grace is a sin. It dismisses the staggering forgiveness we've received in Christ and dishonors the relief of the debt He cleared on our behalf.

Jesus illustrates this with a powerful story. He tells of a servant who owed his king an unfathomable amount—more than he could repay in a thousand lifetimes. Yet, when he begged for mercy, the king forgave the entire debt. Incredibly, that same servant then turned around and refused to forgive a fellow servant who owed him a small fraction of what he himself had owed. Instead of showing the same mercy, he had the man thrown into prison. When the king found out, he was outraged. The servant's actions revealed that he had not truly received the king's mercy—not in any way that changed him. He had taken the gift but refused to pass it on.

When we withhold forgiveness from our spouse, when we deny them grace and mercy, we are no different than that unmerciful servant. We take the mercy of God lightly. We spurn the cross that paid our debt. Our sin against a holy God is infinitely greater than any offense our spouse could commit against us—and yet God forgave us fully, willingly, and at great cost.

Now, maybe you're thinking, *You don't understand what I've endured. The pain is too deep. The betrayal too real. The wounds too fresh to forgive.* And maybe you're right—at least if you're relying on your own strength. But you don't walk by your own power. If you are in Christ, you walk in the power of the Holy Spirit who lives in you. He enables you to do what you cannot do on your own. To forgive and extend grace where it doesn't feel deserved—because that's what God did for you.

Refusing to forgive your spouse is not merely a relational issue. It's a spiritual one. It resists the work of the Spirit in your life to unburden you. Paul reminds us in Romans:

**FOR THE LAW OF THE SPIRIT OF LIFE HAS SET YOU FREE IN CHRIST
JESUS FROM THE LAW OF SIN AND DEATH. ROMANS 8:2, ESV**

You no longer need to harbor unrighteous anger toward your spouse. Not for another moment. Through the power of God within you, all burdens can be released. This process may not occur instantly, but through prayer and communion with God, you can surrender the pain to Him and trust Him with the outcome. Your spouse may have wronged you in the past and may continue to cause pain today. Nevertheless, the way of Christ is the way of forgiveness.

**THEN PETER CAME UP AND SAID TO HIM, "LORD, HOW OFTEN WILL MY
BROTHER SIN AGAINST ME, AND I FORGIVE HIM? AS MANY AS SEVEN
TIMES?" JESUS SAID TO HIM, "I DO NOT SAY TO YOU SEVEN TIMES, BUT
SEVENTY-SEVEN TIMES. MATTHEW 18:21-22, ESV**

In other words, there is no place for Christ alongside anger or bitterness in your heart, particularly toward your spouse. When you struggle with forgiveness, remember the most intimate sinner you know—yourself. Reflect on the cost of your debt and the grace extended to you. You can forgive others because God first forgave you.

MINDSET AND ACTIONS

This section addresses mindset and actions together because actions arise in the context of everyday marital events, and having the correct mindset is essential for executing them effectively.

BELIEF AND ACTION 1: AS THE HUSBAND, I MUST LEAD THE WAY IN MERCY AND FORGIVENESS.

Forgiving begins with the belief that it is your responsibility. However, this task is far more challenging than it appears because it can be humiliating, especially during a disagreement with your wife. Pride is the greatest obstacle to forgiveness because it often requires an apology.

I have found myself somehow at fault in every conflict with my wife. Most arguments

stem from two selfish individuals denying wrongdoing while demanding behavior changes from the other. This dynamic makes forgiveness feel particularly humiliating. Self-righteousness closes your eyes to your faults in the heat of a disagreement. Thoughts arise that justify your behavior and place all blame on your spouse. That may feel satisfying in the moment, but it does nothing to help you move towards resolution.

To address this, take a moment to isolate yourself during your next argument. Calm yourself and pray. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you understand your wife's perspective and reveal how your words or actions contributed to the situation. The Spirit will answer if you genuinely want to listen. Once your fault becomes clear (trust me it is there), resist the urge to dismiss or excuse it. Do not minimize its significance or justify it by comparing it to her actions. Blaming your spouse may preserve your ego, but it only deepens the dispute.

Leadership in marriage requires humility. This humility involves approaching your wife, acknowledging your fault, and apologizing. Be mindful of her emotional state; she may not be ready to engage immediately. Remember, the Holy Spirit is at work in both of you. If she needs more time, use it to reflect on the situation further.

When you apologize, the method matters. An insincere "I'm sorry" or a dismissive "I'm sorry you were offended" will not suffice. The former lacks thoughtfulness, while the latter does not accept accountability and may provoke further conflict. An effective apology involves intentionality and sincerity. Though no formula guarantees success, several principles can guide you.

- **Be genuinely contrite.** If your heart lacks genuine sorrow, delay the apology. Insincerity will be evident, often before you speak.
- **Create an undistracted environment.** Seek a secluded setting with sufficient time for meaningful communication. Reconciliation demands focus.
- **Maintain eye contact.** The eyes serve as windows to the soul. Eye contact fosters connection and conveys sincerity. Even if she avoids eye contact, try to look into her eyes.
- **Acknowledge your wrongdoing.** Address your actions explicitly without shifting

attention to her faults. This moment focuses solely on your responsibility.

- **Recognize the impact of your actions.** Do not simply acknowledge her feelings. Accept that your behavior caused those emotions. Demonstrate empathy by articulating your understanding of how you hurt her. If you do not see her perspective, return to prayer before continuing.
- **Seek forgiveness.** Request her forgiveness without highlighting her shortcomings. Allow the Holy Spirit to address her faults. Your role is to seek reconciliation for your actions and to model grace and mercy. This approach fosters a relationship grounded in peace and justice.
- **Do not expect or wait for a return apology.** She may very well ask for forgiveness or apologize, but keep the focus on your thoughts and actions.
- **Invite God into the process.** Invite her to pray with you. Confess your shortcomings before God and ask for His guidance. Allow her to hear your accountability to Him and your desire for His leadership in your marriage.

Remember that marriage serves as a tool for sanctification. Your wife, as your most intimate partner, sees your true self. Humility requires recognizing the falsehoods within yourself that result from sin. God seeks to grow you in righteousness, often using your wife as one of His primary instruments.

BELIEF AND ACTION 2: IT IS TO MY GLORY TO OVERLOOK AN OFFENSE.

I recall a conversation with a young man who had been in a fight earlier that day at school. When I asked him how it started, he explained that someone had disrespected him, so he retaliated violently. Gently, I suggested it would have been better to take the offense and walk away. His disbelief was immediate and palpable. He shook his head and responded, *“There is no way I could do that.”*

As men, we often resonate with his perspective. When insulted or attacked, instinct compels us to defend ourselves, even to strike back. For some, restraint may come more quickly, but not always for the right reasons. For instance, a man lacking physical strength may walk away simply because he knows he cannot win, not because of a commitment to a higher principle. Many would gladly seize the opportunity to inflict harm on someone who insulted us or our loved ones.

Yet God calls us to a different standard. Scripture teaches that it is to our glory to overlook an offense. Jesus' words challenge us to act in a manner utterly contrary to our instincts:

BUT I SAY TO YOU, DO NOT RESIST THE ONE WHO IS EVIL. BUT IF ANYONE SLAPS YOU ON THE RIGHT CHEEK, TURN TO HIM THE OTHER ALSO. AND IF ANYONE WOULD SUE YOU AND TAKE YOUR TUNIC, LET HIM HAVE YOUR CLOAK AS WELL. AND IF ANYONE FORCES YOU TO GO ONE MILE, GO WITH HIM TWO MILES. MATTHEW 5:39-41, ESV

Jesus does not stop there. He goes further, commanding not only restraint but active love for those who wrong us:

YOU HAVE HEARD THAT IT WAS SAID, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AND HATE YOUR ENEMY.' BUT I SAY TO YOU, LOVE YOUR ENEMIES AND PRAY FOR THOSE WHO PERSECUTE YOU, SO THAT YOU MAY BE SONS OF YOUR FATHER WHO IS IN HEAVEN. FOR HE MAKES HIS SUN RISE ON THE EVIL AND ON THE GOOD, AND SENDS RAIN ON THE JUST AND ON THE UNJUST. FOR IF YOU LOVE THOSE WHO LOVE YOU, WHAT REWARD DO YOU HAVE? DO NOT EVEN THE TAX COLLECTORS DO THE SAME? AND IF YOU GREET ONLY YOUR BROTHERS, WHAT MORE ARE YOU DOING THAN OTHERS? DO NOT EVEN THE GENTILES DO THE SAME? MATTHEW 5:43-47 ESV

Jesus' teaching compels us to overlook offenses, love, and pray for those who offend us. When faced with injustice, retaliation must not be our response because we need to care more for their eternal soul than our ego. Paul echoes this sentiment when addressing believers who sue one another in court:

TO HAVE LAWSUITS AT ALL WITH ONE ANOTHER IS ALREADY A DEFEAT FOR YOU. WHY NOT RATHER SUFFER WRONG? WHY NOT RATHER BE DEFRAUDED? 1 CORINTHIANS 6:7 ESV

This approach may seem counterintuitive, even irrational, but it reveals the nobility and beauty of the Christian life. Adopting this mindset requires God's love to see the higher purpose in allowing ourselves to be wronged. Jesus wants His followers

to live in a way that stands apart from the world, pointing others to Him. When we respond to others with hatred, we do not see them as souls needing redemption. We ignore the broader purposes Christ has for them. Hatred demeans the image of God within them, undermining our witness and dishonoring their Creator.

If this level of forgiveness and grace applies to others, how much more does it apply to our wives? In marriage, your wife will hurt you and need your forgiveness and grace. A marriage where both partners refuse to take offense and retaliate creates an atmosphere of peace and joy. Entire days can be ruined by offenses that could have been overlooked in a minute. Instead, we can extend grace in the small moments by recognizing our selfish tendencies and failures. We can release offenses quickly, forgive freely, and move forward without harboring resentment.

BELIEF 3: GOD KNOWS THE BEST CHANGES TO PRODUCE IN MY WIFE, NOT ME.

After reflecting on the earlier belief, you may think there is no way to foster positive changes in your relationship without vocalizing how your wife offends or hurts you. Let me relieve you of this notion entirely.

No matter how hard you try, you cannot change your wife. Manipulation, argument, or positive encouragement will not transform her into the person or partner you envision. These approaches reflect your efforts to mold her into who she should become. Instead, place her development in the hands of the only One who is both worthy and capable of such a task.

You do not know what your wife needs for proper growth and transformation. God does. Working in her daily, the Holy Spirit is the source of meaningful and lasting change. This belief requires faithful trust. Trust that God is renewing your wife just as He is renewing you. God may use you as an instrument in this process, but the power to change her heart belongs to Him alone. This does not mean you should never voice grievances or explain how something affected you. It does mean that your ability to transform her heart is negligible compared to the work God is already performing. Your primary calling is to lead and love her.

The most significant way God may use you in your wife's spiritual development is through your example. Are you growing closer to God in prayer? She will follow.

Are you learning more about God through His Word? She will do the same. Are you practicing radical generosity? She will be inspired to join you. Are you considering her needs proactively and meeting them before she asks? She will notice and respond. God designed women to follow their husbands' leadership⁴⁰. Your wife wants to see you lead in a Christlike manner.

Another powerful mechanism God uses is your love for your wife. Authentic acts of lovingkindness can soften even the hardest of hearts. Scripture reminds us that God's kindness leads us to repentance (Romans 2:4). Nothing inspires me to follow God and strive to live according to His principles more than reflecting on His immeasurable love for me. Despite my rebellion, He extends His loving arms and calls me His son. You can be an instrument of that same love for your wife. God can inspire her to grow and flourish in ways far beyond your expectations through you.

WORDS OF LIFE

WORD OF LIFE 1: NOTHING IN YOUR PAST, INCLUDING ANY WRONGS COMMITTED AGAINST ME, WILL EVER GET IN THE WAY OF MY LOVE FOR YOU. YOU ARE MINE FOREVER, WHETHER YOU LIKE IT OR NOT. I AM PROUD TO CALL YOU MINE.

These words are proper in only one context: when your wife feels shame or regret. Expressing them outside this context risks making her feel accused, as if you recall some wrong she committed. Avoid bringing such topics up unnecessarily. Because she is human, your wife will eventually experience shame over her past mistakes, especially if she believes those mistakes betrayed you in some way.

The proper response to these feelings is an expression of deep, abiding love. She must know that you love her regardless of who she was or how she hurt you. "I forgive you" is often unnecessary because affirming love and commitment conveys that forgiveness. In those moments, she needs to hear that she is your treasure and that you are proud to have her in your life. She must know you do not see her as tainted or spoiled but as your precious possession.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Withholding forgiveness is poison to any relationship—especially marriage. Deep

intimacy is impossible when one or both partners cling to past wounds instead of committing to the future. You cannot move forward while holding past grievances over your wife's head. Even if she hurt you deeply, ask yourself: will anything get better by constantly reminding her of it?

The truth is, nothing improves when you withhold forgiveness. At best, you might force her into a posture of guilt, waiting for her to break down and plead for mercy. But even if that happens, it only degrades her, making her feel small and unworthy before you. And trust me—that is not good. If your wife feels humiliated or undeserving of your love, intimacy will wither. Your marriage will not be rooted in trust and love, but in fear and doubt. She will always wonder if you've truly forgiven her, and with every minor grievance, her self-worth will erode. If that cycle continues, your relationship will eventually break—and when it does, you will be the one left in misery.

The only person truly damaged by a grudge is the one holding it. So, lead in mercy. Let it go. Whatever the offense, release it. I can personally attest to the power of a forgiving heart—one that is ready to let go of every wrong at a moment's notice. Show your wife the same mercy and grace you hope to receive from her.

Imagine yourself in a moment where you are clearly in the wrong. You go to your wife, offer a sincere apology, and await her reaction. Instead of resentment, anger, or annoyance, she forgives you immediately—pulling you close, restoring intimacy, and making it clear that she values you more than the mistake. That would feel incredible, wouldn't it?

Go and do likewise.

Chapter Twelve

Love Mercy: Give Lovingkindness

The Bible recounts the extraordinary story of Hosea, a prophet of Israel who lived during a time of rampant idolatry. Hosea was a righteous man, chosen by God to deliver His message unconventionally. God commanded Hosea to marry a prostitute, Gomer so that their relationship could serve as a living illustration of Israel's unfaithfulness to God.

Remembering that Hosea was a real person with real emotions is important. Like anyone else, he had hopes, dreams, and the desire for a stable, loving family. He was not some mystical, otherworldly figure immune to pain or confusion. He was an ordinary man from a respectable family, someone who honored God in his daily life. Imagine being in Hosea's position: what would it feel like for God to ask you to marry a prostitute? Even in today's over-sexualized culture, such a command would be shocking. The request would have been utterly scandalous for Hosea, living in a traditional and religious society.

The social consequences of Hosea's obedience would have been immense. He and Gomer likely faced ridicule, ostracism, and financial difficulties. Yet Hosea embraced this role with remarkable faith and, as the story unfolds, with genuine love. He did not approach his marriage with mere duty but sought to build a real relationship with Gomer. Despite her past, he hoped for a fruitful future with her. Together, they had three children, and for a time, they were building a life together.

But the story takes a tragic turn. Gomer likely struggled with feelings of shame and

unworthiness that often hinder healthy relationships. Gomer eventually abandons Hosea and returns to her former life of prostitution. It is easy to judge her, but we cannot fully understand the psychological scars or societal pressures she faced. Her past held her captive, and she ended up in a desperate situation, enslaved to another man who was selling her at a slave market.

At this point, Hosea could have walked away. By human standards, he had every right to feel betrayed and to leave Gomer to face the consequences of her choices. But Hosea's response was astonishing. Reflecting the divine love God instructed him to demonstrate, he went to the slave market, paid the price for her freedom, and brought her home.

Imagine Hosea's mindset during this act of redemption. Gomer was his wife—she already belonged to him in covenantal terms—yet he had to pay to reclaim her. It must have been heartbreaking, yet Hosea did not act out of bitterness or vengeance. Instead, he restored her fully to her role as his wife and the mother of their children. She was not treated as a second-class member of his household but reinstated with all the dignity and love she had before.

Hosea's only request was that Gomer remain faithful to him from then on. His actions mirror God's lovingkindness, a concept captured in the Hebrew word *khesed*. This term embodies steadfast love, mercy, loyalty, and enduring kindness throughout the Old Testament. It reflects God's covenantal faithfulness to His people, even when they repeatedly turn away from Him.

Khesed is not about the recipient's worthiness but the giver's character. Hosea's actions show us God's unwavering commitment to His people—a persistent, compassionate, and restorative love⁴¹.

MEANING AND PURPOSE

AGAPE LOVE

Scripture teaches husbands to love their wives as Christ loves the Church (Ephesians 5:25-33). The Greek word for "love" in this passage is *agape*, the highest and purest form of love. Unlike romantic love (*eros*) or brotherly love (*philia*), *agape* is selfless, unconditional, and sacrificial. It seeks the well-being of another without expecting

anything in return. This divine love closely reflects the concept of *khesed* found in the Old Testament—God’s covenantal faithfulness and steadfast lovingkindness. Agape is the love Hosea showed toward Gomer and the love God continually extends to His people.

When Hosea first married Gomer, his motivation was obedience to God’s command. However, as the narrative unfolds, it becomes clear that Hosea’s obedience grew into a deep, abiding, agape love. His actions reflect this in several ways:

- **Selflessness:** Hosea disregarded his reputation, stepping into social disgrace to bring Gomer back home.
- **Mercy:** Despite her betrayal, Hosea mercifully forgave her without holding her past against her.
- **Sacrifice:** He paid a significant sum to redeem her, even though she already belonged to him in covenantal terms.
- **Flourishing:** Hosea sought Gomer’s flourishing, knowing she was safer and more loved in his home than in the streets.
- **Grace:** Hosea did not require Gomer to “make up” for her betrayal; instead, he graciously restored her to her role as wife and mother.

Hosea’s love for Gomer demonstrates agape love—an image of God’s love for humanity. Through Christ, God offers unconditional love that prioritizes our well-being without demanding anything in return. He forgives, redeems, and restores us to Himself, asking only that we walk in covenant with Him.

AGAPE LOVE IN MARRIAGE

When a husband and wife walk in authentic agape love, their marriage cannot fail. That may sound like a bold claim, but it is true. It helps first to examine why marriages fall apart to understand why this is the case. At the root of every marital breakdown is the abandonment of agape love. Common reasons for this include:

1. **Selfishness:** Instead of humbly focusing on your spouse’s needs, you fixate on your own unmet needs.

2. **Conditional Love:** Rather than offering unwavering commitment, you impose conditions your spouse must meet to keep your interest.
3. **Demands:** Instead of sacrificing daily for your spouse, you demand they find ways to serve you better.
4. **Diminishing:** Rather than encouraging your spouse, you tear them down to elevate yourself.
5. **Scorekeeping:** Instead of loving generously, you keep a mental scorecard to ensure everything feels “fair.”

Any one of these behaviors can damage or even destroy a marriage because they are the antithesis of the love Jesus embodies. If Jesus had acted in any of these ways, we would not be able to return to God. When a husband or wife chooses these paths, they commit themselves to misery and risk the breakdown of their marriage.

Agape love avoids every one of these pitfalls. When both spouses commit to practicing agape love, they try to outdo one another in love. In such a marriage, each person prioritizes the other’s needs and desires, striving to bring joy and fulfillment to their partner. How could such a marriage fail?

But what happens if only one partner is willing to show agape love? Should the loving partner continue to show this selfless devotion? We find the answer in Christ’s character. Would Jesus stop loving you if you rejected Him? The answer is absolutely not. As His disciples, we are to reflect His love, even when it is not reciprocated.

This is the radical nature of agape love. It says: *No matter how you treat me, I will still love you.* That is not easy, but Jesus never promised that following Him would be. He said:

“YOU HAVE HEARD THAT IT WAS SAID, ‘AN EYE FOR AN EYE AND A TOOTH FOR A TOOTH.’ BUT I SAY TO YOU, DO NOT RESIST THE ONE WHO IS EVIL. BUT IF ANYONE SLAPS YOU ON THE RIGHT CHEEK, TURN TO HIM THE OTHER ALSO. MATTHEW 5:38-39 ESV

God asks us to love in a way that values the eternal destiny of others over defending our pride in the moment. While the world expects retaliation and equal measures

of disdain, Jesus commands us to forgive, overlook offenses, and respond with kindness. If this is how Jesus expects us to treat strangers, how much more should we extend this love to our spouse?

Your spouse is yours for a reason. God predestined this union for His purposes. While you may not fully understand why, you can trust that your marriage is part of His sovereign plan. By walking in agape love, you open yourself to being used by God in ways you cannot yet see.

MINDSET

BELIEF 1: GOD'S GRACE IS THE SOURCE OF AGAPE LOVE.

While I have described what a marriage filled with agape love looks like, I have not yet explained how to reach it. The truth is it is impossible for a man to love his wife with agape love without the grace of God. Why? Because God's grace is the very source of it. You cannot offer to your wife what you have not first received.

God's grace—His unmerited favor and kindness toward humanity—is foundational to agape love. It is by His grace that He shows this love to us. For instance, Romans 5:8 declares, *"But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."* Christ's sacrificial death for undeserving sinners is the ultimate act of grace and the highest expression of agape love.

Furthermore, 1 John 4:19 reminds us, *"We love because he first loved us."* Clearly, our ability to love originates from God's love for us. By experiencing God's grace, believers are empowered to reflect His selfless and unconditional love in their relationships.

Do you see what this means? On your own, you are utterly powerless to love your wife with agape love. When you understand that even before you gave your life to Christ, God's grace sustained your ability to love anyone, you begin to grasp how deeply dependent you are on Him.

The Bible tells us that *"Every good and perfect gift is from above"* (James 1:17) and that *"No one is good—except God alone"* (Mark 10:18). Therefore, all goodness flows from God's nature, including the love we give one another. Even the fact that your existence is sustained moment by moment is a gift of God's grace!

This truth extends to your marriage. You rely entirely on God for the grace to fill your heart and pour agape love into your wife. This is the work of the Holy Spirit—God Himself dwelling within you.

Through the Spirit, you are empowered to love your wife with a love that is not conditional, self-serving, and dependent on her actions. Instead, it is a love rooted in God's infinite grace modeled after Christ's sacrificial love for the Church.

**BELIEF 2: THE HOLY SPIRIT IS GOD, AND HE LIVES WITHIN ME.
SURRENDERING MY WILL TO HIM IS THE ONLY WAY TO TRANSFORM
HOW I LOVE MY SPOUSE.**

When you invite God to take control of your life and accept the saving grace of Christ Jesus, the Holy Spirit comes to live within you (1 Corinthians 6:19). He is not some mysterious force to harness like in Star Wars. He is God, permanently dwelling in you, sealing you for His coming Kingdom (Ephesians 1:13-14).

The Spirit is not a what but a who. The Holy Spirit is God, seated on your heart's throne. Being filled with the Spirit is less about gaining power and more about stepping aside to let God work through you. God has all power and can fill you with strength, spiritual gifts, and good things, but this happens as you get off your personal throne of sin, repent, and surrender your will to Him. He will not force Himself upon you.

When I say you need to be filled with God's grace to love your wife, I mean you must allow yourself to be used as an instrument of God who lives within you. His grace flows through you to your wife when you surrender control to the Holy Spirit. You begin to see your wife through God's eyes of love. Your perspective shifts, and you start valuing her with an eternal mindset.

**BELIEF 3: GOD WILL REWARD ME FOR SHOWING AGAPE LOVE, NO
MATTER HOW MY SPOUSE RESPONDS.**

The fear of showing agape love is that you might get hurt—and you are right. Your wife might burn you. Your spouse might reject your love or refuse to reciprocate. Demonstrating agape love to someone who does not love you back in equal measure takes enormous faith in God. You must trust that nothing is more remarkable or satisfying than the love of your Father in heaven. You must believe that His ways

of love and self-sacrifice will lead you to His favor and promises.

You can choose to fight and strive for every scrap of love you can pull from your spouse, or you can surrender the matter to God, walk in His ways, and love as Jesus loves.

Put your future in God's hands. Overwhelm your spouse with love, even if she does not return it immediately. Your wife may one day return your love. One day, she might leave you despite your best efforts. But no matter the outcome, God will be your source of love, provision, joy, and hope. Even if your marriage falls apart after giving it your all, you can trust that God will restore your life and bring you to a new place of joy. It will not be easy, but God's faithfulness ensures that the result will be satisfaction and peace.

The strength to love sacrificially comes from placing your hope and trust in God, who will not fail to reward you. Even if you do not see that reward in this life, you can trust His faithfulness to fulfill His promises.

BLESSED IS THE MAN WHO REMAINS STEADFAST UNDER TRIAL, FOR WHEN HE HAS STOOD THE TEST HE WILL RECEIVE THE CROWN OF LIFE, WHICH GOD HAS PROMISED TO THOSE WHO LOVE HIM. JAMES 1:12 ESV

DELIGHT YOURSELF IN THE LORD, AND HE WILL GIVE YOU THE DESIRES OF YOUR HEART. PSALM 37:4 ESV

BUT LAY UP FOR YOURSELVES TREASURES IN HEAVEN, WHERE NEITHER MOTH NOR RUST DESTROYS AND WHERE THIEVES DO NOT BREAK IN AND STEAL. FOR WHERE YOUR TREASURE IS, THERE YOUR HEART WILL BE ALSO. MATTHEW 6:20-21 ESV

Joy, fulfillment, and happiness are the natural byproducts of pursuing God's design for life and marriage. Pursue your wife with agape love. You will not be disappointed. The joy may not come directly from your wife but from your ultimate prize: God Himself.

WORDS OF LIFE

WORD OF LIFE 1: NO MATTER WHAT YOU DO, I WILL ALWAYS DO MY BEST TO LOVE YOU. EVEN IF YOU HURT OR LEAVE ME, I WILL REMAIN STEADFAST IN MY LOVE FOR YOU.

These words are intended to remind your wife—and yourself—of your unwavering commitment to her. Expressing this love in both word and deed can significantly impact her. I know this to be true because I spoke these words to my wife during a difficult season. But instead of recounting that story again, there is an even more outstanding example we all know: God's steadfast love for us.

In seasons when I have walked in disobedience—knowingly or unknowingly—God has never left nor forsaken me. He was always there, deeply loving me amid my rebellion. Like Israel, I pursued other “gods,” only to find them empty imitations of true blessing and joy. When I turned back to Him, God did not greet me with anger or resentment. Just like the father in the story of the prodigal son, He ran to meet me, embracing me as though I had never strayed or caused Him pain.

Though I often feel unworthy of such a gift, He gently reminds me that I am His son. God does not use anger, frustration, or manipulation to draw me back to Him—He uses overwhelming love.

OR DO YOU PRESUME ON THE RICHES OF HIS KINDNESS AND FORBEARANCE AND PATIENCE, NOT KNOWING THAT GOD'S KINDNESS IS MEANT TO LEAD YOU TO REPENTANCE? ROMANS 2:4 ESV

When I reflect on God's great love for me, I do not want to depart from Him—not out of fear of losing His love, but out of a desire to honor Him and avoid causing Him pain. He does not deserve to be treated with disregard. And when I have betrayed Him, I am disgusted with myself. Yet every time I turn back to Him, His love overwhelms me again, reminding me how precious I am in His sight. The One I betrayed welcomes me back, loves on me, and tells me not to hate myself. Oh, what incredible love!

The same principle applies to our spouses. Overwhelming them with love—especially when they do not deserve it—can bring incredible healing to the marital bond. You

prove your commitment if you respond to your wife's malice with love. Repeating this response of steadfast love, faithfully and consistently, through both your words and actions, sends a powerful message of mercy and grace. Love like this can break down walls, heal wounds, and restore even the most strained relationships.

ACTIONS

ACTION 1: LOVE THE UNLOVABLE.

One of the most challenging places to be in marriage is feeling unloved by your spouse. In that moment, it is easy to focus entirely on what you are not getting from them, often becoming blind to your failings. This mindset can lead you down a dangerous path: "I am not getting what I need, so I will find it somewhere else."

That road is treacherous. It often begins with venting your frustrations to others, including members of the opposite sex, about your spouse's shortcomings. Over time, an innocent conversation can become an emotional attachment, and before you realize it, you are engaging in actions that will destroy your marriage. It is not a sudden fall—it is a slow fade.

When you are in this place, the last thing you want to hear is that the answer is to love as Jesus loves. The pain you feel makes it hard to imagine making a move toward love, especially when your spouse has not taken the first step. But that mentality is rooted in pride, which is deadly to marriage because it shifts all the focus onto yourself. To love as Jesus does, you must lay aside your pride and take intentional steps to show love, even when undeserved.

Unless you have ignored your wife for most of your marriage (in which case the problems are apparent), you already know how she receives love. Now, it is time to lay aside your pride and act on that knowledge in a way she cannot help but notice.

- Has she been asking you to paint a room for months? If so, pick out swatches with her and paint the room, expecting nothing in return.
- Has she complained that you do not talk to her enough? Look up "conversation starters for couples" and engage her in meaningful discussion.
- Has she said you do not show her enough physical affection? Hold her hand,

rub her back, play with her hair, or offer her a full-body massage.

Whatever her love language is, target it with intention. Speak to her heart with actions or words that show love in the way she understands.

Her response will likely be shock or surprise, followed by gratitude. Put yourself in her shoes for a moment. If you felt unloved and responded with anger or withdrawal, how would you react if your spouse suddenly did something that made you feel deeply loved? Would you lash out or be more likely to soften and love them back?

Love begets love. It is a powerful principle that works. The natural response to feeling unloved is anger; the longer it lingers, the more entrenched it becomes. This cycle continues until one spouse breaks it—with agape love. Choose to be the one who breaks the cycle. Love as Jesus loves selflessly, sacrificially, and without waiting for anything in return.

ACTION 2: GO ALL IN WITH GOD.

When I say, “go all in,” I mean all in. Turn on worship music at full volume. Lift your hands and praise Him with everything you have. Sing at the top of your lungs. Get on your knees and cry out to Him in desperation. When distractions come, start again, and do not give up. Read God’s Word for as long as it takes. Meet with brothers in Christ and talk about Him. Obsess over God—this is what you were created for!

Remember, the only source of agape love is God. You cannot give what you do not have, and you cannot have it without knowing Him deeply. You gain agape love by running toward God. As you draw closer to Him, the problems in your marriage will begin to seem more minor. Giving your spouse the same unconditional love you have received from God will become easier to grasp.

Invite God into your heart and stir up your relationship with Him. This will strengthen your love for your wife, especially when you do not feel loved. Stop looking to the world and stop dwelling on your problem. Instead, focus on the One who can solve it.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

I won’t lie to you, gentlemen—loving your wife sacrificially can be exhausting. It requires mental, physical, and spiritual energy to do this well. Over time, it becomes

second nature, but that process takes effort because of our inherent tendency to focus on ourselves.

By nature, we are selfish. When I truly reflect on it, the depth of my own self-absorption shocks and humbles me. The sheer amount of mental energy I devote to my own wants and needs fills me with shame. And I know I'm not alone in this—we are all wired the same way.

Overcoming selfishness takes work. Loving selflessly—putting someone else's needs before our own—is where the real exhaustion lies. It's not that sacrificing for your wife is hard because of any conditions she places on it. It's hard because we have to take ourselves out of the equation. That's no small task. It's easy to fixate on our own needs, to dwell on the ways we feel unappreciated or the ways our wives aren't laying down their lives for us in return. We can waste hours throwing ourselves personal pity parties, resenting the perceived unfairness of it all.

I'm telling you—let that go. Man up, just like Hosea. You may just find she has been more gracious than you realize.

Go and be Christ to your wife.

Chapter Thirteen

Walk Humbly: Lead God's Way

BE WATCHFUL, STAND FIRM IN THE FAITH, ACT LIKE MEN, BE STRONG.
LET ALL THAT YOU DO BE DONE IN LOVE. 1 CORINTHIANS 16:13-14 ESV

Many Christian pastors instruct men to lead their wives and families. But what that leadership looks like—and how to live it out—often feels elusive. One reason is that pastors cannot convey the necessary information in short thirty-minute sermons on Sundays, requiring men to seek added counsel. While many resources teach biblical manhood, cultural forces seek to overshadow them, redefining manhood in ways that undermine God's design.

This cultural pushback suggests something hazardous to the enemy about men stepping into God-designed leadership roles. Our culture works tirelessly to reshape men into a new image—one that is anti-God and contrary to biblical manhood. Instead of godliness being celebrated, men are bombarded with false ideals: power, wealth, fame, and endless sexual conquest. Culture flaunts these images as success, leaving men feeling inadequate when they do not measure up and encouraging them to make unwise and selfish decisions. As my pastor, aptly said, “No one in our culture is offering high-fives for living life God's way.”

The result? Christian men like you, the reader, are constantly confronted with messages about what it means to be a man—but those messages are often wrong. What I often see are three competing visions of manhood, all of which are flawed. Culture tells men to choose between being:

1. An alpha male who dominates other men through aggression and strength

and women through sexual magnetism.

2. A subservient beta male who apologizes for existing and worships the ground women walk on.
3. A lone wolf who prides himself on independence and insists he needs no one.

None of these are correct, yet competing cultural forces presents them as ideal, leaving men confused and disoriented. Christianity must once again clarify this picture to raise mighty men who can lead in a way that honors God. So, how are men supposed to lead?

MINDSET & ACTIONS

The following sections pair beliefs and actions together because it is easier to understand the actions whilst considering the mindset.

BELIEF 1: I AM RESPONSIBLE FOR MY HOME'S SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP AND MORAL DIRECTION.

One of the best illustrations of moral leadership comes from what many consider the most excellent superhero movie of all time: *The Dark Knight*⁴². The scene in focus is the tense moment involving two ferries trying to escape Gotham City. For those who may not have seen the film, the Joker has rigged both ferries with explosives and handed detonators to the passengers aboard each ship. One ferry carries civilians, while the other carries convicted criminals. The Joker gives the vessels a moral dilemma: each can detonate the other ferry to save itself, but if neither acts, both will be destroyed.

As time runs out, a large, imposing convict approaches the officer holding the detonator on the criminals' ferry. He commands the officer, "Give it to me, and I'll do what you should have did ten minutes ago." Reluctantly, the officer hands him the detonator, assuming the convict is ready to do the unthinkable: blow up the civilians to save themselves. Instead, to everyone's surprise, the convict throws the detonator out of the window. He returns to his seat, silently showing incredible moral clarity and restraint.

This minor character captures an essential aspect of biblical manhood: the responsibility

to bring moral clarity and spiritual leadership, even in the most chaotic and morally complex situations.

Men Are to Lead Spiritually

FOR THE HUSBAND IS THE HEAD OF THE WIFE EVEN AS CHRIST IS THE HEAD OF THE CHURCH, HIS BODY, AND IS HIMSELF ITS SAVIOR. EPHESIANS 5:23 ESV

The “headship” described in this verse conveys authority, but more importantly, it emphasizes accountability. Just as Christ leads the Church sacrificially and with great care, men are called to lead their families similarly. Headship in the home is not about domination but about stewardship and responsibility.

IN THE SAME WAY HUSBANDS SHOULD LOVE THEIR WIVES AS THEIR OWN BODIES. HE WHO LOVES HIS WIFE LOVES HIMSELF. FOR NO ONE EVER HATED HIS OWN FLESH, BUT NOURISHES AND CHERISHES IT, JUST AS CHRIST DOES THE CHURCH, BECAUSE WE ARE MEMBERS OF HIS BODY. EPHESIANS 5:28–30 NLT

Paul's instruction here highlights that a husband's leadership includes nurturing and caring for his wife physically and spiritually. Men are to ensure the spiritual well-being of their families, taking an active role in pursuing God's will for the home.

What Spiritual Leadership Entails

This responsibility does not mean men must always have the best answers or superior insight compared to their wives. Scripture never implies the moral superiority of one sex over the other. However, men must take the initiative and drive the family's spiritual life.

Leadership involves being the first to seek God's will and ensuring that the household stays aligned with it. This includes:

- Understanding and pursuing God's desires for the family.
- Setting up daily practices that foster a relationship with God (e.g., Reading Scripture, prayer, conversations about faith).
- Engaging in the intellectual pursuit of understanding who God is and what

He commands.

- Prioritizing church attendance and community participation.
- Modeling giving and generosity.

Many men find this list overwhelming, particularly if they feel their wives are better equipped to lead spiritually. If that is you, take heart: what matters most is that these practices happen, not who leads them. Just as God sent Aaron to help Moses speak to Pharaoh, your wife can help you in spiritual leadership. However, it is vital to understand that God will ultimately hold men accountable for the spiritual direction of their homes.

Leadership is not about perfection—it is about responsibility. You may not feel qualified, but God does not call the qualified; He qualifies the called. Start small, lean on God's grace, and trust Him to guide you as you lead your family toward Him.

BELIEF 2: I AM RESPONSIBLE FOR LAYING MY LIFE DOWN TO PROVIDE FOR MY WIFE AND CHILDREN.

One of my favorite movie moments comes from *Cinderella Man*⁴³, a film that recounts the true story of boxer James Braddock. During the Great Depression, he lost everything, and his family was utterly destitute, struggling to survive. In one poignant scene, James' wife, Mae, serves a meager breakfast. Each family member has a small piece of ham. When their daughter, Rosemarie, finishes hers, she asks for more. Mae gently explains that there is no more food for her.

At that moment, James tells Rosemarie about a dream he had the night before—a dream in which he enjoyed a massive steak dinner. Then, pretending he is too full of the imagined meal, he offers her his piece of ham. When I first watched this scene, I could not hold back a tear—not because the situation was heartbreaking but because of the profound self-sacrifice I witnessed.

Here was a grown man, worn from a hard labor job, facing the grim reality of extreme poverty. Yet he humbly placed his daughter's needs before his own. Through love and selflessness, he provided for her physically and emotionally. This scene captures another crucial role for men: laying down their lives for the sake of their families.

Sacrifice and Provision

Men are to lay down their lives to serve and provide for those around them. Scripture underscores this responsibility:

BUT IF ANYONE DOES NOT PROVIDE FOR HIS RELATIVES, AND ESPECIALLY FOR MEMBERS OF HIS HOUSEHOLD, HE HAS DENIED THE FAITH AND IS WORSE THAN AN UNBELIEVER. 1 TIMOTHY 5:8 ESV

Provision requires sacrifice. It means consistently showing up, day after day, to do the work necessary to meet your family's needs. And while this often involves finances, provision is not limited to material goods. Husbands and fathers must also sacrifice their time, strength, and resources to fulfill their God-given roles.

This means:

- Putting your agenda on hold to notice and address your family's needs.
- Postponing personal purchases to prioritize your household's needs.
- Giving up leisure time to invest in your wife and children.
- Laying aside personal dreams for the higher purpose of leading your family into God's will.

Jesus expressed this principle beautifully:

UNLESS A GRAIN OF WHEAT IS BURIED IN THE GROUND, DEAD TO THE WORLD, IT IS NEVER ANY MORE THAN A GRAIN OF WHEAT. BUT IF IT IS BURIED, IT SPROUTS AND REPRODUCES ITSELF MANY TIMES OVER. IN THE SAME WAY, ANYONE WHO HOLDS ON TO LIFE JUST AS IT IS DESTROYS THAT LIFE. BUT IF YOU LET IT GO, RECKLESS IN YOUR LOVE, YOU'LL HAVE IT FOREVER, REAL AND ETERNAL. JOHN 12:24-25 MSG

Provision and sacrifice go hand in hand. You must relinquish your claim to comfort, ease, or entitlement to provide effectively. Provision requires humility and an intentional focus on the needs of others, starting with those closest to you.

Start with Your Wife

Your wife is the first person entrusted to your care. At a minimum, you have one soul to love, serve, and lead into God's eternal Kingdom. Leading her well often begins

with small, practical acts of selflessness. Let go of what you think you deserve and focus on her needs.

Jesus showed this sacrificial love when He gave His life for the Church. In the same way, men are to give their lives daily, providing not only for the physical needs of their families but also for their emotional and spiritual growth.

BELIEF 3: I AM RESPONSIBLE FOR DEMONSTRATING TRUE STRENGTH THROUGH GRACE AND MERCY.

Many men equate strength with physical prowess or bravado. While physical strength has its place, when used to elevate oneself or diminish others, it becomes bullying—something of no value to anyone but the bully. It is disheartening to watch two men clash over pride, which stems from insecurities and ego rather than strength. In contrast, true strength is proven through grace and mercy.

One of the most potent examples of this comes from the modern cinematic rendition of *Les Misérables*⁴⁴. In one unforgettable scene, Jean Valjean, newly released from prison, is shown kindness by a priest who offers him food and a warm place to sleep for the night. Despite this act of charity, Jean betrays the priest's trust by stealing silver from the church. He is quickly caught by French officers and brought back to the priest to confirm his crime. At this moment, the priest has every right to demand justice. Instead, he does something remarkable: He affirms Jean's false story that the silver was a gift and gives Jean additional silver candlesticks, claiming he "forgot" to take them.

This extraordinary act of mercy shifts the trajectory of Jean Valjean's life. The priest chose not to focus on the loss of material possessions but instead saw Jean's desperate need for redemption. By showing mercy rather than judgment, the priest reflected the heart of God, prioritizing the eternal over the temporary.

Another example comes from the series *The Chosen*⁴⁵. In one episode, Jesus and His disciples are detained by Roman soldiers and ordered to carry their gear for one mile, as required by Roman law. This was a degrading command, serving as a reminder of Jewish subjugation. Jesus, like the others, is forced to bear the burden of the soldiers' equipment. The disciples, frustrated and indignant, watch Him closely, knowing His power and anticipating He might retaliate or deliver a

miraculous rebuke. But He does neither.

At the end of the required mile, the soldiers dismiss the group, allowing them to stop. Yet Jesus does not stop. He continues walking, still carrying the soldiers' gear. When asked why, he responds that their base is another mile away and offers to carry their burdens. The Romans were astonished at this response and began to treat Jesus and his disciples with more respect. This is undeserved grace in action—a grace that surpasses human expectations and leaves an indelible mark.

True Strength and Grit

Both examples illustrate the grit and selflessness that define true manhood. Men are to set aside pride and endure personal humiliation to serve others. True strength is overcoming the instinct for retaliation or self-preservation and instead acting to benefit another's eternal soul. Jesus Himself taught this principle:

YOU HAVE HEARD THAT IT WAS SAID, 'AN EYE FOR AN EYE AND A TOOTH FOR A TOOTH.' BUT I SAY TO YOU, DO NOT RESIST THE ONE WHO IS EVIL. BUT IF ANYONE SLAPS YOU ON THE RIGHT CHEEK, TURN TO HIM THE OTHER ALSO. AND IF ANYONE WOULD SUE YOU AND TAKE YOUR TUNIC, LET HIM HAVE YOUR CLOAK AS WELL. AND IF ANYONE FORCES YOU TO GO ONE MILE, GO WITH HIM TWO MILES. MATTHEW 5:38–41 ESV

It takes tremendous inner strength to resist the urge for vengeance. Even those with less physical strength can retaliate in cunning or malicious ways. But Jesus calls men to rise above this instinct:

BUT I SAY TO YOU, LOVE YOUR ENEMIES AND PRAY FOR THOSE WHO PERSECUTE YOU...AND IF YOU GREET ONLY YOUR BROTHERS, WHAT MORE ARE YOU DOING THAN OTHERS? DO NOT EVEN THE GENTILES DO THE SAME? MATTHEW 5:44, 47 ESV

Grace and mercy are not signs of weakness but of true power and control. These qualities distinguish a man from the world, drawing others to the Kingdom of God. Scripture further reminds us:

DO NOT REPAY EVIL FOR EVIL OR REVILING FOR REVILING, BUT ON THE

CONTRARY, BLESS, FOR TO THIS YOU WERE CALLED, THAT YOU MAY OBTAIN A BLESSING. 1 PETER 3:9 ESV

The strength to respond with blessing rather than bitterness is not natural—it is supernatural. It requires reliance on God’s grace and a heart fixed on eternity. This kind of strength plants seeds that will bear fruit for generations, drawing others to Christ and glorifying God.

Men, let us rise above pride, retaliation, and ego. Demonstrate the true strength that comes from grace and mercy, and in doing so, reveal the character of Christ to a watching world.

BELIEF 4: I AM RESPONSIBLE FOR ENSURING MY WIFE AND CHILDREN'S PHYSICAL AND SPIRITUAL SAFETY.

I cannot address the topic of protection without referencing one of my favorite movies, *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King*⁴⁶. Aragorn’s speech before the battle at the Black Gate has echoed in my mind for years:

Hold your ground! Hold your ground! Sons of Gondor, of Rohan, my brothers! I see in your eyes the same fear that would take the heart of me. A day may come when the courage of men fails, when we forsake our friends and break all bonds of fellowship. But it is not this day. An hour of wolves and shattered shields when the age of men comes crashing down. But it is not this day! This day we fight! By all that you hold dear on this good Earth, I bid you stand, Men of the West!

Aragorn’s rallying cry to the men of Gondor and Rohan has bolstered my courage over the years. While the original context is a fictional battle, its resonance goes far beyond Middle-earth. It captures a truth about the role of men: to stand firm against evil in all its forms—to fight with everything we have against anything that threatens the lives, souls, and hearts of those we hold dear.

The War of Ideas

Today, physical threats to our families are not as common as they once were. The greatest danger is not to their bodies but to their minds. There is a war of ideas raging across the world, and Christianity stands as the most cohesive and compelling truth in the face of countless lies. Yet, as Paul reminds us, our battle is not against

flesh and blood:

FOR WE DO NOT WRESTLE AGAINST FLESH AND BLOOD, BUT AGAINST THE RULERS, AGAINST THE AUTHORITIES, AGAINST THE COSMIC POWERS OVER THIS PRESENT DARKNESS, AGAINST THE SPIRITUAL FORCES OF EVIL IN THE HEAVENLY PLACES. EPHESIANS 6:12 ESV

The enemy is relentless in his attempts to infiltrate the minds and hearts of Christians, especially our wives and children. The antidote to these attacks is men of God, standing united, stubbornly opposing the falsehoods that threaten our faith and culture.

The Role of Men in Leading and Protecting

As husbands and fathers, we are called to lead and protect physically and spiritually. Scripture teaches that God designed men to lead (Ephesians 5:22–25). This design reflects God's natural order. While men are not the only capable leaders, history and Scripture reveal that where men go, society follows. This leadership role comes with great responsibility, especially in safeguarding the minds and hearts of our loved ones.

The attacks on our families are not merely physical; they are ideological. Lies and distortions are far more dangerous because they can affect the eternal destiny of those we love. Physical threats are temporary; spiritual threats have eternal consequences.

How do we protect our loved ones from these attacks? Not by retreating from the world. Separation has its place—such as keeping a young teenager off social media and away from pop culture until they are mature enough to handle it—but shielding them entirely from the world's ideas is not the solution. Instead, we must equip ourselves to engage in the battle directly.

The most effective strategy is to bring harmful ideologies into the light at home, addressing them in a safe and godly context. This requires preparation on your part. It is not enough to rely on Sunday services or Christian schools to disciple your family. You must actively pursue God's wisdom through:

- Daily Bible study and prayer

- Seeking counsel from wiser men and women
- Reading books that deepen your theological and intellectual understanding
- Learning about the foundations of Western thought and philosophy

Only by equipping yourself can you effectively guide your wife and children through the challenges they will inevitably face. You cannot teach what you do not know nor model what you have not practiced.

Standing as a Spiritual Wall

You will naturally call your wife and children to do the same as you grow in wisdom and understanding. Your godliness will not only affect your family but will also stand out in your community. In moments of moral clarity, your faith will shine brightly. But even in quiet moments, you stand as a spiritual wall—a stubborn, immovable force that the enemy hates. Paul emphasizes this role when he says:

**PUT ON THE WHOLE ARMOR OF GOD, THAT YOU MAY BE ABLE TO
STAND AGAINST THE SCHEMES OF THE DEVIL. EPHESIANS 6:11 ESV**

Just as Aragorn needed the men of the West to stand with him, Jesus calls us to stand with Him against a world that hates Him. Our job is not to conquer; the victory is already won. Our job is to stand firm until our King returns in glory.

When discussing protection, many men focus solely on physical safety: securing their homes, installing cameras, or buying firearms. While these are valid measures, they are not enough. Physical threats today are rare when compared to the scope of history. The greater danger lies in abdicating your responsibility to protect your family's spiritual well-being.

It is far easier to set up a security system than to read a book on theology. But do not let what is easy distract you from what is essential. The eternal trajectory of your wife and children is far too precious to leave in the hands of others.

Equip yourself. Stand firm. Protect your family from physical harm and, more importantly, from the enemy's lies. Stand like faithful men of the West, passing on the legacy of faith and truth to the next generation. Be the brick wall the enemy cannot penetrate, the godly protector your family needs. And know that as you stand, you reflect the strength and steadfastness of Christ Himself.

WORDS OF LIFE

WORD OF LIFE 1: I DESIRE TO FOLLOW CHRIST WITH ALL MY HEART, MIND, AND STRENGTH. I WILL NOT DO THIS PERFECTLY. PLEASE BE PATIENT WITH ME AND FOLLOW ME AS I FOLLOW HIM.

These words communicate to your wife your sincere desire to follow God in every area of your life. They affirm the direction of your heart and life while acknowledging your imperfections.

Think about a leader you admire. Consciously or unconsciously, you hold certain expectations of them. Perhaps this leader has not yet fallen short of those expectations. However, the unfortunate reality is that all leaders will eventually fall short because of their humanity. These expectations can weigh heavily on leaders, who are acutely aware of their limitations and failures. This is why we are to look to the one leader who will never fail us: Jesus Christ.

By speaking these words to your wife, you are pointing her to Jesus. You are acknowledging your humanity and your inevitable shortcomings as a leader. At the same time, you affirm your commitment to follow Jesus and promise to do your best to lead your family in His ways.

When you fall short—and you will—these words help set a foundation of grace in your marriage. They encourage your wife to be patient with you, not because you deserve it, but because she looks to Jesus as her perfect example. In this way, your leadership is not just about your efforts but about leading her to trust in Christ above all.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Biblical manhood calls for leadership that is both humble and strong—especially in marriage and family. Christian men are called to lead, not through domination or passivity, but by following Christ's example of sacrificial love. True leadership means taking responsibility for the spiritual direction of your home, serving selflessly, protecting faithfully, and showing strength through grace and mercy—not pride or aggression.

Your role goes beyond simply providing for your family's physical needs. You are

their spiritual protector, their first line of defense against harmful ideologies, their guide toward truth in Christ. That kind of leadership requires more than good intentions—it demands continual growth in godly wisdom, a daily pursuit of God's will, and an intentional effort to cultivate a Christ-centered home.

And hear this clearly: if you don't lead, someone else will—and it will likely be in a direction you don't want your family to go. So step up. Take ownership. Get wisdom. Lead your wife!

Chapter Fourteen

Walk Humbly: Prioritize Your Wife

Growing up, I tended to view my life as a series of domains arranged in a specific priority: God, marriage, family, church, and work. While this framework was helpful in some ways, I have realized it also had unintended consequences.

First, dividing life into distinct categories discouraged me from living a unified, integrated life. I created separate goals for each domain, but these goals often conflicted rather than complemented each other. As a result, I pulled my time and attention in different directions, creating tension and frustration when I could not reconcile the competing demands.

Second, this approach limited my understanding of the broader, overarching goals I should have been pursuing. I often developed plans that, in hindsight, were not aligned with God's purpose for my life. The apostle James warns against this tendency, reminding us to give our plans to God's will and remain flexible as He directs us (James 4:13–16). Unfortunately, I struggled with flexibility. When my plans failed, I interpreted it as personal failure rather than God's providential redirection.

Finally, this framework encouraged me to focus on impact rather than relationships. For example, I saw my marriage as a domain to manage rather than a relationship with someone with thoughts, feelings, and a will. I did not grasp that true greatness is not about achieving success in various areas of life but about serving and loving the people God has placed in those areas.

A better way to frame priorities is through relationships rather than domains. Jesus taught that the greatest commandments are to love God and love our neighbor, summarizing the law and prophets (Matthew 22:37–40). This demonstrates that God's Kingdom is people-centric. Nowhere in Scripture are we called to pursue worldly achievements as ends in themselves. Instead, we are instructed to seek the Kingdom of God first, trusting Him to provide for our needs (Matthew 6:33).

This does not mean we should not have goals. Goals can help us focus our efforts. But our goals should be relational, aimed at directly helping others. The culture around us often encourages the pursuit of fame, wealth, power, and pleasure as paths to happiness. Even with good intentions, such as working hard to improve the lives of loved ones, it is easy to lose sight of what truly matters when we adopt the world's definition of success.

An astute reader might ask, "How can I love and serve others if I do not have the resources? Do I not first need to pursue power, influence, and possessions to bless others?" This is a valid question. Yes, resources are tools God gives skilled stewards to accomplish His purposes. However, the danger lies in prioritizing these pursuits over God's mission.

When we focus on things rather than people, we risk neglecting what truly matters. For example, this might look like working excessive hours to "build a better life" for our family while neglecting our relationships with them. It might also look like withholding generosity from someone in need when we have the capacity to help, promising to give in the future rather than blessing others with what we have now. It might look like striving for influence and fame while losing our inner character. In such cases, we have made life about ourselves, sidelining the God who works through us.

Ultimately, this mindset reveals to God that we cannot steward those closest to us well because our priorities are misaligned with His. Why would He entrust us with broader responsibilities when we do not recognize what genuine responsibility looks like?

MEANING AND PURPOSE

How do we prioritize the people God has placed in our lives? By giving them our attention. To “place attention” on something means giving our thoughts, emotions, energy, and resources to steward it well. Since we are finite, we cannot do everything or be everywhere. Recognizing our limitations helps us understand the importance of saying no—even to good things—so we can focus on what God has called us to.

Where, then, does God call us to place attention? The proximity of relationships matters greatly. The people in our lives are not there arbitrarily. If God is sovereign, every relationship, opportunity, and circumstance is part of His providential plan. For example, I have applied to many jobs but have only been employed by a few specific companies. Why those and not others? It’s likely because God wanted me in those environments for that season. And what did He want me to do there? To love my neighbor, reflect His glory, and point others to their need for Him.

This is the heart of prioritization: people need God. As we have seen earlier in this book, the ultimate purpose of existence is to know Him. This truth applies to every person without exception. Humanity exists to walk in a relationship with God; we are His instruments to draw others closer to Him. Everything we do should be permeated with an obsession to bring glory to God so that others may see and praise Him.

Considering this, a better way to think about priorities is as follows: God should be the central relationship we pursue with utmost attention, followed by our spouses, children, extended family, friends, acquaintances, and finally, strangers. Let us now explore what it means to prioritize your wife.

MINDSET

BELIEF 1: I MUST LEARN TO MANAGE MY HOUSEHOLD WELL BEFORE TAKING ON THE RESPONSIBILITY OF STEWARDING OTHERS.

If you are anything like me, you may have thought that giving God our attention means doing grandiose things for Him. You might dream of making a massive impact, showing Jesus to as many people as possible. While these desires are noble, they can distract us from the more straightforward, more pressing responsibilities right in front of us. Why would we pursue grand gestures to display God’s glory to strangers

while neglecting the opportunity to show His glory to our wives and children?

Consider this: what will God say to those who spent their lives serving strangers while ignoring the people He placed in their care?

Here is a hard truth: God does not require us to carry out His purposes. He can save everyone who wants to be saved without our help. Yet, in His grace, He invites us to participate in His work, considering our decisions and efforts as He brings about His will. Grand churches, missions, crusades, conferences, and altruistic organizations have their place in God's plan, and He uses them to draw people to Himself. But these pursuits should never come at the expense of those closest to us. Paul makes this clear in his letter to Timothy:

**HE MUST MANAGE HIS OWN HOUSEHOLD WELL, WITH ALL DIGNITY
KEEPING HIS CHILDREN SUBMISSIVE, FOR IF SOMEONE DOES NOT
KNOW HOW TO MANAGE HIS OWN HOUSEHOLD, HOW WILL HE CARE
FOR GOD'S CHURCH? 1 TIMOTHY 3:4-5 ESV**

The beauty of prioritizing your wife and children is that you steward the souls you love most into God's Kingdom. My heart breaks at the thought of not seeing my cherished ones in heaven. By placing them first, you create the opportunity to lead them as you follow Christ. As Paul also says:

BE IMITATORS OF ME, AS I AM OF CHRIST. 1 CORINTHIANS 11:1 ESV

BELIEF 2: I MUST LEARN TO WALK IN THE RHYTHMS OF GRACE.

It is one thing to agree on how we should prioritize and another to put it into practice. How do we ensure that we are devoting enough attention to a priority? Should we stringently monitor our time and efforts to know how much we have poured into each person? When I think of doing that, it feels like a path to burnout! What do we do, then?

One Sunday, my pastor introduced a concept called "*walking in the rhythms of grace*." The basic premise is that walking out our faith in Christ is a light burden. Jesus said:

**COME TO ME, ALL WHO LABOR AND ARE HEAVY LADEN, AND I WILL
GIVE YOU REST. TAKE MY YOKE UPON YOU, AND LEARN FROM ME,**

**FOR I AM GENTLE AND LOWLY IN HEART, AND YOU WILL FIND REST
FOR YOUR SOULS. FOR MY YOKE IS EASY, AND MY BURDEN IS LIGHT.
MATTHEW 11:28–30 ESV**

As best I can explain, we need to stop striving for what we think we need or where we want to be. Instead, we must surrender control and allow God to move in our lives. What if we trusted God a little more? What if we gave Him the credit He deserves by believing He can do “far beyond what we could ask or imagine” (Ephesians 3:20)? Our future is not our burden to bear!

Walking in the rhythms of grace means living in the knowledge of God’s providence, grounded in His sovereignty. God’s plans will be achieved, and no one can stop them. If this is true, then His plan for our lives will be carried out no matter what we do. This does not mean we cannot resist Him or make our lives unnecessarily complicated. His plan accounts for our free choices and decisions.

What I mean is that God will fulfill His will for the world, for us, and for those around us—whether we choose to be a part of it or not. The trajectory of our lives comes down to our trust in God’s providential wisdom.

A fitting example of walking in the rhythms of grace is King David⁴⁷, of whom God said:

**AND WHEN HE HAD REMOVED HIM, HE RAISED UP DAVID TO BE THEIR
KING, OF WHOM HE TESTIFIED AND SAID, ‘I HAVE FOUND IN DAVID THE
SON OF JESSE A MAN AFTER MY HEART, WHO WILL DO ALL MY WILL.’
ACTS 13:22 ESV**

David’s faithfulness to God is evident throughout his life. Samuel anointed him king as a young man, but the crown did not come immediately. After his victory over Goliath, David grew close to King Saul’s family and even married his daughter Michal. Yet, when Saul turned against him, David spent eight years running for his life.

During this time, David had opportunities to take matters into his own hands and kill Saul, but he refused. He trusted God’s timing instead of forcing events. David believed that if God anointed him as king, God had a plan to fulfill it.

This does not mean the process was easy. Many Psalms reveal David’s anguish and cries to God. But in the end, David chose to rest in God’s plan rather than his own.

Resting in God does not mean doing nothing. David used his time in the wilderness wisely, learning leadership, building a loyal army, and making strategic decisions. But it was God who fulfilled the promise!

Our lives may not resemble what we initially imagined when all is said and done. But if God is behind it, they will be far better than anything we could have planned. Walking in the rhythms of grace is the key to balancing our priorities and trusting in His perfect plan.

BELIEF 3: I MUST LEARN TO TRUST THAT GOD WILL HANDLE MY NEEDS.

One of the biggest obstacles to prioritizing God's will is our lack of faith that He will provide for us. This lack of trust often manifests in small, everyday decisions: skipping time with the Lord to do something more "important," neglecting opportunities to serve and love our wives because we feel overwhelmed, or forgoing Bible time with our kids in favor of some leisure. While these choices may appear minor, they often reveal misplaced priorities. And yet, we rationalize these choices with seemingly valid reasons. We tell ourselves things like:

- "Sleep is important for my health."
- "I'm working hard to improve our life."
- "I need to take care of myself first to take care of my family better."

These statements may contain some truth but can subtly lead us away from our true priorities. Over time, we focus more on our needs and desires than God's calling. The solution lies in living as though we genuinely believe God will care for us—because He will. Jesus assures us:

BUT SEEK FIRST THE KINGDOM OF GOD AND HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS, AND ALL THESE THINGS WILL BE ADDED TO YOU. MATTHEW 6:33 ESV

This is more than a promise; it is an invitation to rest in God's care. When we stop striving for comfort, security, and gratification, we can refocus on God and the people He has placed in our lives.

Trusting God with our needs liberates us from the constant stress of self-sufficiency. It allows us to experience the fullness of His provision, which far surpasses anything we could arrange for ourselves. When we trust God:

- We no longer feel pressured to control every aspect of our lives.
- We find peace in knowing that He sees and meets our needs.
- We find freedom to prioritize what truly matters—loving God and loving others.

In marriage, this trust frees you from worrying over what you are or are not getting from your wife. Leaning on God as a supplier of our needs helps you avoid putting expectations or pressure on your wife for her love. Of course, she is supposed to give you love. But again, you cannot change her. You can only pursue God and trust He works deeply in her life.

The more we surrender to God's care, the more we discover His unwavering faithfulness. Trusting Him is not just an act of obedience but a path to joy, peace, and fulfillment. As we lean into His promises, we will find that living with God as our provider allows us to fully embrace the priorities He has called us to.

WORDS OF LIFE

WORD OF LIFE 1: I DESIRE AND CHERISH YOU MORE THAN ANYONE ELSE. YOU MEAN EVERYTHING TO ME, AND NO ONE COMPARES TO YOU.

Everyone longs to be the center of someone's world. Your wife must hear how special she is to you and feel that all others are forsaken because she belongs to you. Only God should hold a higher place in your heart. She needs to know she is your world—the object of your desire and affection—and that your life would never be the same without her.

However, a word of caution: these words are empty unless you reinforce them through consistent action. You can say this to your wife countless times, but if your actions do not align with your words, they will eventually lose meaning.

Love is not just spoken; it is proved in how you treat her daily. Small gestures, acts of kindness, and consistent prioritization of her needs and wants over your own validate your words. Without this reinforcement, even the most heartfelt expressions of love may eventually be ignored.

ACTIONS

ACTION 1: SHOW INTENTIONAL AND FREQUENT LOVE TO YOUR WIFE IN HER LOVE LANGUAGE.

If you are unfamiliar with Dr. Gary Chapman's concept of the five love languages, you are missing some transformative tools for loving your wife well⁴⁸. Chapman shows five primary ways people give and receive love: quality time, acts of service, gifts, words of affirmation, and physical touch. His book changed the way I approached my marriage. The key idea is this: for your spouse to feel genuinely loved, you must express love in the way that resonates most deeply with her.

Early in my marriage, I thought I was doing something amazing by cleaning the entire apartment from top to bottom. I would vacuum, dust, and scrub every surface, feeling like a rockstar husband. Why? Growing up, I saw my older sister, whose love language is acts of service, and how much she appreciated it when her husband did something unexpected for her. Naturally, I assumed my wife would feel the same.

She did not.

While she appreciated my effort, it did not make her feel especially loved. My mistake was assuming her love language was the same as my sister's. My wife needed love in a distinct way—her love language was not acts of service. My cleaning was like using a Philips screwdriver on a flathead screw: the effort was there, but I was using the wrong tool.

Missing the Mark

Giving love to your wife in a language other than her own can feel like:

- Cooking a gourmet meal but spitting it out instead of swallowing it.
- Landing a near-perfect golf shot only to miss a hole-in-one by half an inch.
- Dominating a chess game, only to lose because of one careless mistake.

Each scenario involves effort and good intentions but lacks a satisfying conclusion. If you do not intentionally speak your wife's love language, your expressions of love will always fall short of the impact you hope to make.

Speaking Her Love Language

To make your wife feel loved, learning her love language is essential. For many women, this is not static—it can change based on the season of life. For instance, before having kids, acts of service might not resonate much. But as a mother juggling endless tasks, small acts of help (like doing the laundry or grocery shopping) can mean the world. Here are some examples of what intentionality looks like across the love languages:

Words of Affirmation: A thoughtful expression is not a Hallmark card—it is using your words to convey your love. Write her a note, poem, or even a song. Sometimes, I leave notes for my wife to discover unexpectedly. The delivery can matter as much as the words themselves.

Quality Time: This is not “Netflix and chill.” Quality time is about undivided attention. I struggled to sit still and enjoy my wife’s presence early in my marriage. Over time, I learned to turn off distractions and enjoy her presence, whether through meaningful conversations or silent companionship. If this is new and difficult for you, explain your intention to her and request her patience as you learn to just be.

Acts of Service: This is not about hiring someone to clean the house; it is about tackling the things that weigh on her. For example, when my wife mentioned wanting built-in bookshelves, I surprised her by ordering the materials and starting the project before she could settle for something less satisfying. Thoughtfulness means predicting her needs and responding with care.

Physical Touch: This is not just about sex. Even women with a sexual love language often want intentionality behind physical expressions of love. My wife enjoys having her hair played with as she falls asleep. I prioritize this nightly ritual because it makes her feel loved. The key is sensitivity—understanding how she wants to be touched and when.

Gifts: A thoughtless gift misses the mark (e.g., Starbucks card for a Dunkin’ lover) and will make her question if you even know her. Pay attention to what she loves, especially the tiny details. When my wife’s wireless earbuds malfunctioned, I researched and found an affordable replacement. Though gifts aren’t her primary love language, the effort showed her she was on my mind.

Consistency and Frequency

Speaking her love language is not a one-time act but a habit. If gifts are her love language, get her small, thoughtful items regularly. If it is quality time, dedicate at least one night a week to undistracted togetherness.

Over time, these gestures become second nature. My wife notices and appreciates how I express love for her, but I always look for new ways to show her care because love languages can change over time. Loving her well requires sensitivity to the season, active listening, and creativity to adapt to her changing needs and desires.

Make it a fun challenge to predict and meet her needs. The effort you put into learning and speaking her love language will deepen your connection, strengthen your marriage, and ensure your wife feels genuinely loved.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Living a life that genuinely prioritizes your wife is not about simply managing your time or setting specific goals—it is about embracing the deeper nature of love and commitment. Biblical prioritization begins with recognizing that relationships are central to God’s design for our lives. When we align our focus with God’s purposes, we discover that the most meaningful and lasting impact comes not from pursuing worldly achievements but from cultivating and stewarding the relationships He has entrusted to us.

Prioritizing your wife means seeing her not as another “task” to check off but as the person closest to your heart, a gift from God. At the core of this chapter is the truth that your wife needs to be loved, cherished, and valued in tangible ways. This involves proving intentional love through actions that resonate with her heart, whether through words of affirmation, acts of service, quality time, physical touch, or thoughtful gifts. More importantly, it means showing her—consistently and intentionally—that she holds a place in your life second only to God.

Walking humbly before God also requires walking humbly before your wife. This involves setting aside your desires, seeking her best, and trusting that God will provide for your needs as you honor His call to love her well. In doing so, you will bless your marriage and position yourself to fulfill the greater calling of leading and

loving others. As Paul instructed Timothy (1 Timothy 3:4–5), managing your household well opens the door to broader stewardship within your family and beyond. When you prioritize your wife, you reflect His love in your home and become a vessel of His love and grace to the world around you.

Section 4

MARRIAGE
INTIMACY

Chapter Fifteen

Defining Intimacy

My wife is a wedding photographer, and her work often places us around many newlywed couples. Something almost all of them share is that they are blissfully in love. You can see it in their eyes. How the bride and groom gaze at each other reveals a deep adoration and affection. In those moments, they feel such connection that it seems inconceivable it could ever fade, much less be severed. While they might intellectually acknowledge that challenges will arise, their closeness in this season drowns out those concerns, immersing them in a dream of unending love and connection. They feel known, accepted, and wanted. Intimacy reigns.

For years before and after marriage, I often heard that love was primarily a choice—something you committed to, especially during the rough patches. In my experience, this is true, but only to an extent. Sometimes, couples must reject discontentment or frustration and intentionally choose to remain faithful. Yet, this perspective risks minimizing emotions' profound role in bonding a marriage. While an intellectual commitment to one's spouse is invaluable during struggles, the feelings born of intimacy create and sustain a lasting connection. These feelings fulfill one of our deepest desires: to be wanted.

People who know me well might be surprised to hear me talk this way. For much of my life, I viewed emotions as impulsive and fleshly—something to be conquered by the intellect. I would often quote Jeremiah:

**THE HEART IS DECEITFUL ABOVE ALL THINGS, AND DESPERATELY SICK;
WHO CAN UNDERSTAND IT? JEREMIAH 17:9, ESV**

But I had misunderstood the Jewish conception of the heart. We often equate the heart with feelings in our modern context, but this is not how Jeremiah's original audience would have understood it. The Hebrew word for heart, "leb," encompassed far more than emotion. It refers to a person's core, including the mind, will, intellect, and moral reasoning. It was the seat of one's inner life, where thoughts, decisions, and motivations originated.

Once I understood this, I began to see emotions differently. God created emotions; they are inherently good since they are part of His nature. Emotions are a gift from God!

Imagine a world without emotion—it would be bleak and lifeless. Love as a purely intellectual choice would be undesirable without the beauty of emotional connection. God designs marriage to offer much more than merely obeying duty or rules. It is meant to be a relationship of depth, where both intellect and emotions flourish.

A marriage rooted in intellectual understanding and emotional depth will be far stronger. The bond created by passionate feelings is incredibly powerful. That intoxicating "*falling in love*" feeling, though it may sometimes cloud judgment, also acts as the glue that keeps marriages thriving rather than merely surviving.

What if I told you that the rapturous passion you felt at the start of your relationship is sustainable throughout your marriage? You might look at me skeptically, especially if you have experienced the ups and downs of married life. Yet, I am here to tell you it is possible and part of God's design. Consider this verse from the Song of Songs:

HOW BEAUTIFUL IS YOUR LOVE, MY SISTER, MY BRIDE! HOW MUCH BETTER IS YOUR LOVE THAN WINE, AND THE FRAGRANCE OF YOUR OILS THAN ANY SPICE!. SONG OF SOLOMON 4:10, ESV

The entire book of Song of Solomon is filled with similar expressions of passionate love and adoration. It illustrates how God designed marital love to be a rapturous, mutual longing that can only be satisfied in one another's presence.

At this point, you might think, "Whoa, calm down. I am independent; I do not need to be desperate for anyone." If that is your thought, I would challenge you to consider whether pride is keeping you from experiencing the fullness of God's design. Nowhere in Scripture are we instructed to be completely independent.

God teaches us to be hardworking, resilient, and ambitious, but we are also called to relationships and community. This starts with deep intimacy with your spouse.

Passionate love with your wife does not undermine your manhood—it enhances it. Demonstrating this kind of love is an act of chivalry, and it honors both your wife and God. Far from being a sign of weakness, it shows strength and humility.

Another objection might be that this sounds like obsessive or unhealthy love. But this is not the “obsessive” love glorified in pop culture, where a partner is idolized. That kind of love places a spouse in God’s rightful place, leading to dysfunction. The passion I am advocating draws you closer to God through intimacy with your spouse.

Christian marriage is not a covenant between man and woman alone. God is the third party to this covenant, always present and central. Pursuing intimacy with your wife is an act of worship of the Creator who made her. The more deeply you love and cherish her, the more glory God receives.

WHAT IS INTIMACY?

Intimacy describes a state of being deeply connected and near to one another. The Bible captures this concept in its definition of marriage:

...AND THEY SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH. GENESIS 2:24 ESV

Because this description is central to the biblical understanding of marriage, it must be important. Consider the various purposes of marriage: human flourishing; reflecting God’s holistic image into the world; procreating; and demonstrating Jesus love for the Church. Intimacy is the mechanism that enables these purposes to function most effectively. When we cultivate intimacy with our wives, our marriage reflects God’s relational nature and works as God intended.

God is triune, existing as one God in three distinct Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Each Person of the Trinity has a unique center of consciousness, making God inherently relational. Within the Trinity is perfect intimacy and harmony, as each Person shares the divine nature and entirely agrees about all things, including their distinct roles. This oneness allows for the perfect execution of God’s plans, unchallenged and unhindered.

Similarly, increased intimacy can help a husband and wife achieve greater effectiveness in fulfilling the purposes of marriage.

Husband and wife acting in unison is a beautiful and inspiring sight. We have all encountered couples like this—couples who speak kindly to and about one another, are united in their direction and purpose, and support one another in everything. Their joy is evident, attractive, and even contagious, leaving us longing for that same kind of relationship in our own lives.

While no human relationship can fully mirror the perfect unity of the Trinity, an intimate marriage comes closest. This is why such unity draws us in: it offers us a glimpse of the divine harmony we were created to long for and reflect on. If intimacy within marriage reflects God's relational nature, the more a husband and wife pursue intimacy, the more their marriage will point others to God.

HOLISTIC INTIMACY: BODY AND SOUL

By God's design, marriage is the most intimate of human relationships. It uniquely engages the soul and the body, leaving nothing hidden or unexposed between spouses.

Human beings are body-soul composites. We are not merely bodies or souls but a complementary union of both. This understanding is essential for cultivating intimacy because it highlights how to connect effectively with our spouse. Intimacy is not merely a state of mind or the physical connection of bodies. Instead, it is the unification of two distinct body-soul composites in a sacred and transformative way.

THE TOOLS OF CONNECTION

Both the body and the soul have tools for fostering intimacy. The body's tools are the five senses—touch, taste, smell, hearing, and sight—enabling us to physically experience and connect with our spouse. The soul also has tools for connection:

- **Spiritual Sense:** Our ability to commune with another's soul and God (often called the spirit of man).
- **Moral Sense:** The soul's ability to discern right from wrong.
- **Rational and Emotional Faculties:** The soul's seat of thought and feelings, allowing us to share and engage with each other's inner life.

Understanding these dimensions of human nature helps us grasp how to build holistic intimacy. Intimacy is not limited to physical acts like hugging, touching, or kissing, nor is it solely about spiritual, emotional, or intellectual connection. Intimacy flourishes when the soul and the body are simultaneously engaged in the process.

THE PURSUIT OF ONENESS - BODY AND SOUL

True intimacy is about pursuing oneness. The Apostle Paul touches on this idea when he writes:

OR DO YOU NOT KNOW THAT HE WHO IS JOINED TO A PROSTITUTE BECOMES ONE BODY WITH HER? FOR, AS IT IS WRITTEN, "THE TWO WILL BECOME ONE FLESH." 1 CORINTHIANS 6:16 ESV

Paul highlights that sexual activity is more than just a physical interaction. It creates "oneness" of body and soul. When this occurs outside the sacred bounds of marriage, it violates God's design. In the example of a prostitute, there is no intent to pursue selfless love or to bond deeply. One person seeks pleasure; the other seeks payment. Such acts misuse God's most potent instrument of bonding—sex—and dishonor the sacredness of human nature. Paul continues:

FLEE FROM SEXUAL IMMORALITY. EVERY OTHER SIN A PERSON COMMITS IS OUTSIDE THE BODY, BUT THE SEXUALLY IMMORAL PERSON SINS AGAINST HIS OWN BODY. 1 CORINTHIANS 6:18 ESV

To sin sexually is to violate the sacredness of our very essence as beings made in the image of God. While this is an important lesson we will revisit in a later chapter, for now, let us focus on the inferred point: intimate acts like sex engage both the body and soul.

A HOLISTIC APPROACH TO INTIMACY

When pursuing intimacy with your spouse, you must engage her entire person. Intimacy is not the pursuit of her body to the exclusion of her soul, nor the pursuit of her soul to the exclusion of her body. Both are essential because your wife is a body-soul composite like you.

Authentic intimacy requires a holistic approach. This means incorporating activities that engage the physical, spiritual, emotional, and intellectual. Pursuing your wife

in this complete way is the pathway to the most profound intimacy.

Josh Squires offers a helpful framework for understanding distinct types of marital intimacy⁴⁹. His categories provide a practical way of holistically building intimacy, engaging both body and soul. These categories include:

- **Spiritual:** Intimacy cultivated through spiritual activities like prayer, worship, and the shared pursuit of God.
- **Recreational:** Intimacy built through shared hobbies, interests, or leisure activities.
- **Intellectual:** Intimacy created by sharing rational thoughts, ideas, and meaningful conversations.
- **Emotional:** Intimacy nurtured by expressing and stewarding feelings with vulnerability and care.
- **Physical:** Intimacy formed through bodily connection, including but not limited to sexual intimacy.

These categories are helpful to remember as you consider specific ways to be intimate with your wife. You should spend time pursuing each area, as all are important.

BUILDING INTIMACY

Intimacy is not a simple switch you turn on or off; it is better understood as a temperature—sometimes hot, sometimes cold. Every marriage experiences high and low intimacy seasons, but the goal is to minimize those colder seasons and return quickly to a place of closeness. To do this, we must identify the common factors that detract from intimacy and address them head-on.

COMMON INTIMACY DETRACTORS

Busyness

Busyness is one of the greatest enemies of intimacy. It creeps into our lives subtly, often through good things like work, ministry, children, or serving others. While these activities can be important, they must never take precedence over your spouse. Neglecting your wife—even for noble causes—can be sinful if it means ignoring the priorities God has set for your marriage.

Walking in God's rhythms means trusting Him to handle the things you will likely overcommit to. This could mean saying no to overtime pay that interferes with date

night or stepping back from a church activity so you can spend time connecting with your wife. Your spouse must remain a daily priority. Fight to preserve time for her and make a conscious effort to speak her love language. Intimacy flourishes when both partners feel valued and pursued.

Work

Work can often detract from intimacy, as it can shift our focus from something truly fulfilling to something merely good. While God created work for humanity, and it is indeed beneficial, issues arise when we allow our jobs to become idols we worship for the personal value we derive from them.

Men, in particular, crave respect, and for many, the workplace serves as the primary source of that respect. This can lead to spending excessive time with co-workers who provide the validation we seek. As we excel in our jobs, we receive praise from our superiors and peers, earn rewards and bonuses, and rise up the ladder of “success.”

However, this focus on work can detract from intimacy with our wives, resulting in lost quality time together. It can also send a subtle message that we’d rather be at work than with our spouses, which complicates matters, especially if intimacy is already a challenge. Why invest effort to earn respect at home when it is so readily available at work?

As I have mentioned before, nothing surpasses the praise and admiration you can receive from your wife. Authentic praise from her is incredibly uplifting. However, you cannot feel that admiration if she doesn’t express it, and she is more likely to offer praise when you engage in actions that she finds commendable in her life. While she may appreciate what you accomplish in your job, she is often disconnected from it. It is crucial to demonstrate how the work ethic, attitude, and service you apply at work also translate to your marriage and home life.

Adultery

It may seem evident that adultery damages intimacy, but many men do not grasp the whole meaning of the term. Jesus taught that even looking at another woman with lust is adultery (Matthew 5:28). This includes consuming pornographic material or engaging in emotional intimacy with women who are not your wife. Developing close female friendships, for instance, can create dangerous vulnerabilities. I have heard

too many men say, “We’re just friends,” only to find themselves in compromising situations.

Remember, we are body-soul composites and emotional intimacy often leads to physical desire. Ask yourself: Why do I need another female friend in my life? Any emotional or relational benefit you receive from her should now come from your wife. When you married, you vowed to forsake all others, and that includes emotional dependencies outside your covenant relationship.

Sharing your body or soul with another creates a spiritual barrier between you and your wife. Malachi 2:13–16 reminds us that God sees our unfaithfulness and holds us accountable. Such breaches invite guilt, shame, and spiritual darkness into your marriage. Whether it is lust, pornography, or an emotional affair, these actions surrender your body and soul to forces that want to destroy your union.

You need to know that adultery begins in the heart, and its effects are far more destructive than you realize. Protect your marriage by guarding your eyes, thoughts, and emotions. Establish healthy boundaries with other women, even if they are long-time friends. If they are not your mother or your sister, you do not need to be sharing intimate details about your life with them. God equipped your wife with everything you need both spiritually and physically.

Love of Things

Pursuing material possessions can distract us from addressing relational distance in marriage. Building intimacy requires intentionality, effort, and selflessness—qualities that take time to cultivate. It is tempting to substitute this challenging work with the pursuit of things, believing, “If I just make more money, or if we can afford this experience, then we will be happy.”

While material possessions or shared experiences can bring short-term happiness, they cannot create the deep, lasting connection a healthy marriage requires. Relying on these things as substitutes for genuine intimacy only delays addressing the underlying issues in your relationship.

There is nothing wrong with material blessings in themselves, but when they become a distraction from authentic connection, they hinder the growth of your marriage.

True intimacy cannot be bought; it must be nurtured.

Entertainment

Entertainment, while often harmless in small doses, can detract from intimacy. According to a 2024 survey conducted by Harmony Healthcare IT, the average American spends 4 hours and 37 minutes daily on their phone⁵⁰. Given that a significant portion of phone usage includes entertainment activities such as streaming videos, social media, and gaming, it's reasonable to infer that adults spend several hours each day on screen-based entertainment.

Even before my marriage, I became obsessed with video games. What began as casual entertainment turned into an escape. I prioritized these virtual worlds over my wife, damaging our relationship. I still remember a day when my wife walked past me completely undressed to get my attention. I was so immersed in gaming that I did not notice her. That moment damaged our intimacy, and I missed a blessing she was trying to share with me.

Even shared entertainment can hinder intimacy. According to a 2019 study by Privilege Home Insurance, couples in the United Kingdom spend approximately 19.2 hours per week watching television together, averaging about 2.7 hours daily⁵¹.

Couples often binge-watch shows together, believing they are bonding. While there is nothing inherently wrong with enjoying a favorite show, overindulging in screen time can prevent a deeper connection. Entertainment fills your mind with the concerns of a story rather than the concerns of your spouse, creating an illusion of closeness that often lacks real substance.

Building intimacy sometimes means an intentional choice to turn off the television and embrace discomfort or silence. My wife and I have had evenings where we sit together, too tired to talk, but we have learned to value those quiet moments. They often lead to meaningful conversations or physical connections because we focus on each other instead of a screen.

Self-Worship

Another typical detractor is self-worship, which often disguises as self-discovery or self-love. For my Parks and Recreation fans out there, it is the "treat yourself,"

mentality. Instead of focusing on God and their spouse's needs, a person consumed with self-worship becomes preoccupied with questions like, "Who am I? What do I want? Where do I fit? What do I feel?" This inward focus closes their eyes to their spouse's needs and undermines intimacy.

God has already defined our identity, and Scripture calls us to center our lives on Christ, not ourselves. Marriage thrives on humility, not pride. When self-obsession takes hold, it becomes impossible to cultivate the selflessness needed for proper connection.

You will not find intimacy in self-exploration but in self-giving. Focusing on your spouse instead of yourself reflects Christ's sacrificial love, which is the foundation of a healthy and flourishing marriage.

RECOGNIZE DESIRE

The key to building intimacy with your spouse is understanding why intimacy is desirable—not just because of its benefits but because humans long for it so intensely.

Every person with properly functioning emotional faculties desires to be known, accepted, and wanted by another human being. This yearning is so fundamental to our design that God Himself declared its absence "not good":

THEN THE LORD GOD SAID, "IT IS NOT GOOD THAT THE MAN SHOULD BE ALONE; I WILL MAKE HIM A HELPER FIT FOR HIM." GENESIS 2:18, ESV

This declaration is striking. Adam was in the Garden of Eden, in perfect fellowship with God, yet God still said Adam was "alone." Why? Because Adam lacked human connection—a need God Himself placed in his nature. God was not referring to His presence, which Adam already enjoyed. Instead, He was pointing to something specific and essential: the companionship of another human being.

We want human connection because God designed us this way. Without it, we feel incomplete. Those who claim they can "go it alone" are deceiving themselves; the longing for human connection cannot be suppressed and will cry out for fulfillment.

When building intimacy with your wife, it is crucial to recognize that she desires

human connection as much as you do. Her heart longs to experience three things:

1. **To Be Known:** She wants you to see her for who she truly is—the real, unfiltered personality.
2. **To Be Accepted:** She wants to feel she belongs to you, entirely and unconditionally.
3. **To Be Wanted:** She wants you to pursue her and feel that you delight in her presence.

Now, pause and reflect on this: you want these same things. This longing is not accidental but part of God's ingenious design. He created this need to draw us into deep, intimate relationships, enabling us to function as a male-and-female partnership that carries out His purposes for marriage.

By understanding the depth and source of this longing—in both you and your wife—you can better pursue the intimacy that fulfills God's design and brings lasting joy to your marriage.

IDEALS FOR BUILDING INTIMACY

When working to build intimacy with your wife, remember these essential ideals. These principles lay the foundation for a thriving and deeply connected relationship.

Humility

Humility is the cornerstone of intimacy. Humans are naturally self-absorbed, spending much of the day focused on personal agendas, thoughts, and feelings. To build intimacy, you must consciously shift your focus away from yourself and onto your wife.

Think about her feelings, struggles, thoughts, dreams, and health. By dwelling on her needs and desires, you will notice ways to bless and serve her. Is she overwhelmed with work? Do the laundry or tidy up the house to lighten her load. Does she miss time with her children? Plan a family day so she can enjoy them fully. Is she struggling spiritually? Set aside time to pray for her.

Humility allows you to tune into her needs and satisfy the intimacy she craves. The more you focus on her, the more opportunities you will find to deepen your connection.

Intentionality

Intimacy thrives on consistent effort. While life's demands can make connection challenging, the ideal is to pursue intimacy intentionally daily.

This could be as elaborate as planning a day of adventure and fun or as simple as skipping an evening TV show to spend an hour talking with and pursuing your wife. The specific actions matter less than the effort of your pursuit. Make her feel prioritized daily, even in small ways.

Build Consistency

One of the best ways to maintain regular intimacy is to incorporate it into your daily routines. Develop meaningful "rituals" that create connection and intimacy.

These rituals look different for every couple, but you should focus on your wife's love language. Whether it is a morning coffee date, a daily walk, or a simple moment of prayer together, rituals that speak to her unique needs will make her feel seen, accepted, and wanted.

Variety

While consistency is vital, variety is equally important. Adding unexpected moments of love and creativity keeps intimacy fresh and exciting.

Surprises and new ideas inject energy into the relationship. This could mean planning an impromptu date, leaving her a heartfelt note, or trying something new together. That "in-love" feeling often comes from a mix of steady rhythms and fresh expressions of affection.

Look for inspiration—online, from friends, or even by asking your favorite AI assistant! Keep her on her toes and avoid making your love stagnant or redundant. Remember, the thoughtfulness behind these gestures is what makes her feel valued.

Authenticity

You cannot manipulate your way into intimacy. Authenticity is non-negotiable. If your actions come across as calculated or insincere, your wife will see through them, and it will harm the relationship rather than build it.

True intimacy requires genuine desire. If you genuinely want to connect with your

wife on the deep level we have described in this chapter, she will sense it in every interaction. If not, your efforts may feel manipulative—like you are just trying to get something from her rather than giving her your whole self.

Openness

Openness means letting your wife see the real you. This does not mean sharing every thought or confessing every detail—some things are better left unsaid, such as past feelings for another woman. Let go of those thoughts entirely. What openness does mean is letting your wife into your inner life.

Lower your guard and let her see your soul. Share your thoughts, emotions, dreams, memories, and passions. She should know the authentic you in a way no one else does. While keeping your guard up with others is not always healthy, doing so with your wife is incredibly damaging. She has earned the unique privilege of knowing your heart fully—do not hold it back.

Presence

Finally, intimacy requires your undivided presence. Let go of work, entertainment, and other distractions to give your wife your full attention. Jesus reminds us that God controls life's worries (Matthew 6:31–33), so trust Him to handle them and focus on your wife when you are together.

Even if you only have 20 minutes, make those minutes count. Listen to her thoughts, respond to her mood, and engage with her fully. Give her your full attention to make her feel seen and understood.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Building intimacy in marriage is about fully engaging both body and soul with the person you have committed your life to. Lasting intimacy is cultivated through intentionality, selflessness, and a commitment to your spouse's holistic well-being. A marriage thrives when both husband and wife seek to know, accept, and pursue one another fully, as God has designed.

Ultimately, intimacy is rooted in a mutual desire to be known and wanted, and this desire comes directly from God. He created marriage for companionship and the kind of unity that mirrors His relational nature. When we pursue intimacy with our

spouse, we engage in worship—honoring God's design and the gift of the person He has given us.

As you move forward, remember that intimacy is both a gift and a responsibility. It requires humility, frequency, consistency, variety, authenticity, openness, and presence. By practicing these qualities, you will strengthen the bond between you and your spouse, building a relationship that attracts others into the Kingdom of God.

Chapter Sixteen

Practices for Building Intimacy

In high school, my girlfriend (now my wife) and I had an interesting—and often hilarious—way of resolving arguments. Typically, I would say something rude, immature, or obnoxious that would understandably make her angry. Her response was to leave the house and go for a walk, knowing full well that I would follow her. How did she know this? Because she lived in what I thought was a dangerous neighborhood at the time. She knew I would never let her walk alone, no matter how mad she was at me. What a 135-pound, scrawny teenager could have done to protect her is beyond me, but if I could go back, I would follow her just the same. She would walk about 100 feet ahead of me while I trailed behind like a guilty shadow. Every so often, she would glance back to see if I were following her, giving me the most frustrated look when she spotted me. It was all part of the game—pretending she did not want me there. This was how she got me away from her family so we could work things out.

Eventually, she would lead us to a local park and a quiet, secluded spot with no one else around. As she slowed her pace to a crawl, I knew my time had come. I would catch up, talk, and apologize—because, let us face it, teenage boys are clueless in relationships. By the time we walked home, we would be holding hands, the argument behind us.

Looking back, this memory is vivid and sweet, full of imagery that makes me smile. It was our special little ritual for resolving fights and finding unity again.

Consistent practices like this are vital to a healthy marriage, and this chapter is about them. Here, I will outline the intentional habits my wife and I have developed over the years to stay connected and nurture intimacy. Just as building good, daily habits for yourself is important, creating rhythms that foster closeness in your relationship is equally important. These routines provide the natural cadence every relationship needs to flourish.

WALKING

Walking has always been one of the most meaningful activities in my relationship with my wife. It may seem simple—just getting outside and walking together—but over the years, I have seen it as so much more than that. Walking is a space to reconnect, reset, and deepen our relationship. It has become one of our favorite ways to spend time together, especially on vacation.

One of the reasons walking is so powerful for us is that it naturally removes distractions. Outside, away from the demands of the house and the screens, we are left with just each other and whatever beauty surrounds us. This quiet setting often invites conversations that might not happen otherwise. We have found ourselves talking about the deep, meaningful things—our faith, what God is doing in our lives, what we are struggling with, and what we are grateful for. We discuss hopes, dreams, and practical plans for the future. Walking gives us uninterrupted time to explore these thoughts, strengthening our bond and helping us stay spiritually and emotionally in sync.

Beyond deep conversations, walking is simply a way of sharing an experience. Whether exploring a new trail, admiring architecture in a historic neighborhood, or just soaking in the day, a sense of companionship grows when we are engaged in the same environment. We create shared memories, notice the details, and enjoy the same sights. These small, shared experiences build a foundation of connection and companionship that we carry with us even after the walk ends.

When planning a walk with your wife, the specifics of where you go or when are not as crucial as your intentions. Still, a little thoughtfulness can make a difference. A park or trail might be perfect if your wife loves nature. If she is interested in history, a stroll through an older part of a town would delight her. And sometimes,

spontaneity is best—if the weather is nice and you both have a free moment, taking advantage of it with a quick walk can feel refreshing and joyful.

Once you are on the walk, remember that the goal is intimacy and connection. Try to resist the urge to fill the time with topics that might pull you away from each other's hearts, like work frustrations or politics. Instead, take this time to focus on her. Ask her about what has been on her mind recently, how she is feeling, or if there is anything she has been wanting to talk about. Listen carefully and be responsive to what she shares. Do not jump into problem-solving mode if she is going through a challenge. Instead, ask if there is a way you can support her and be sensitive to whether she needs advice or just a listening ear.

Sharing about yourself is also vital. Be open and honest with her about what is going on in your life—your thoughts, worries, and joys. She is not just your partner but your confidant and closest friend, and your willingness to share strengthens your trust. I have found that when I set aside my pride and listen to my wife's perspective on my challenges, I often gain insights I could not see on my own. This openness can bring a strong sense of unity and shared purpose.

And, of course, do not overlook the small gestures of affection. Hold her hand as you walk, or if you are in a secluded spot, pause to share a kiss. Take a moment to stop, look her in the eyes, and tell her how much you appreciate her. These small acts of romance remind her that you cherish her, even in the simplicity of a walk.

PRAYER

Praying together and for each other is a powerful way to strengthen your bond with your spouse. I remember an older couple I admire who once shared that daily prayer is their “secret sauce” for a lasting and joyful marriage. Every day, even when they don't particularly feel like it, they sit across from each other, hold hands, and begin to pray. They pray for one another, their friends, church, country, and anything else that weighs on their hearts. Sometimes, they find themselves praying for an hour without even realizing how much time has passed. It's beautiful to consider—two people, united in the most intimate of relationships, joining their souls in prayer and inviting God into every part of their lives. How could a marriage falter that spends so much time in God's presence and seeks His wisdom together?

We often hear that there is “power in prayer,” but many do not honestly believe it—or at least do not live as if they do. Few people prioritize prayer, and part of the reason is that they do not fully understand their role as priests in God’s Kingdom.

Did you know that God has made you a priest? The apostle Peter writes:

YOU YOURSELVES LIKE LIVING STONES ARE BEING BUILT UP AS A SPIRITUAL HOUSE, TO BE A HOLY PRIESTHOOD, TO OFFER SPIRITUAL SACRIFICES ACCEPTABLE TO GOD THROUGH JESUS CHRIST. BUT YOU ARE A CHOSEN RACE, A ROYAL PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR HIS OWN POSSESSION, THAT YOU MAY PROCLAIM THE EXCELLENCIES OF HIM WHO CALLED YOU OUT OF DARKNESS INTO HIS MARVELOUS LIGHT. 1 PETER 2:5, 9, ESV

The Bible teaches that, as believers, we have direct access to God (Hebrews 10:19-20) and can approach Him boldly, confident that He hears and accepts us because of Jesus’ sacrifice. Realizing this transformed my perspective on prayer. I used to see prayer as merely a way to connect with God—and it is that, but it is also much more. As one of God’s priests, I have direct access to the ear of the King. Now, when I pray for others, I imagine myself standing before His throne, interceding on their behalf, pleading for His guidance, provision, and mercy.

As a husband, I want you to see that you are uniquely positioned to be your wife’s advocate before the Father, offering up sacrificial prayers on her behalf. God already knows her needs and struggles, but He often waits for us to intercede. He may not answer every prayer precisely as we wish, but He promises to bring peace, comfort, and joy and to fill our hearts with the strength to support those we love. When you pray for your wife, you align your heart with her concerns and make her burdens your own. And when you pray aloud for her, she hears the petitions you are making for her well-being, and she is encouraged, knowing you are lifting her before God.

Praying with your wife is terrific, but there is something uniquely powerful about praying specifically for and over her. When she is facing a troublesome situation, lift her in prayer. When she is anxious or unwell, pray. When she feels overwhelmed, pray. Let her hear your petitions to God on her behalf, daily if possible. This reminds her that she is not alone—that God is with her and that you are her spiritual support,

inviting God's presence into her life through your prayers. These prayers need not be lengthy, complex, or filled with religious language. Speak from your heart, addressing the specific situation and believing that the God who calls you His son and daughter is there with you, listening.

SHOWERING

I warn you that the following section may make you feel a bit uncomfortable; however, this really is such an impactful way of building intimacy that it is worth the risk to include it.

The answer is always yes if your wife invites you to join her in the shower. Even if you have already showered, do not miss the chance to be with her in such a unique and intimate setting.

Showers can be a wonderful place to build intimacy because it brings you together in a physically vulnerable and emotionally open way. Standing together, completely bare before each other, offers an opportunity to show how much you cherish her without distraction. It is a time when physical closeness can naturally lead to emotional connection.

That said, it is vital to approach a shared shower with the right mindset. The goal is not to pursue sex but to foster intimacy. If you go in with the wrong agenda, you are likely to miss the point and put pressure on her, which can damage the connection you are trying to build. Instead, focus on making her feel seen, valued, and loved without expecting anything.

You may wonder if this requires instruction. Is not taking a shower self-explanatory? But what I am describing here is not intuitive to most men. The goal is to serve her in a way that creates an experience of love and security, and this often requires a little thought and intention.

If you are going to start a shared shower, begin by asking. She may be hesitant, especially if she thinks your intentions are self-serving. Assure her that you want to spend quality time together—and follow through by keeping that promise. This may also be a challenge if you have ever been critical of her body. Negative comments can leave lasting scars, making her feel uncomfortable or insecure about being exposed

around you. It is essential to rebuild trust by learning to appreciate her body and communicating your genuine admiration. For example, the Song of Songs in the Bible is full of the man celebrating even his beloved's unique or "imperfect" features. If you have let cultural standards cloud your perception of her, seek God's help in reshaping how you view her. She needs to know that you see her as beautiful, and that begins with you believing it yourself.

Once she is comfortable and agrees, pay attention to her mood and approach the experience sensitively. Sometimes, she may see this as a quick, practical shower—especially if she has much to do. In that case, focus on helping her get through it efficiently. But if she is unhurried, you can make the experience more romantic and attentive. Some actions may initiate vulnerability or awkwardness, but you can help her feel at ease with patience and gentleness. However, if something makes her uncomfortable, respect that boundary.

During the shower, the focus should be entirely on her. Serve her in small, caring actions: help her undress, let her stand in the stream of water, massage her back, and gently wash her hair and body. This is about honoring her and showing your love through thoughtful service. The goal is to bless her every moment, creating a space where she feels valued and cared for.

Use your words to affirm her. Praise her body, noticing and appreciating her unique beauty, but never criticizing or suggesting she should do more to care for herself. She carries enough self-criticism already; your role is to build her up, not add to her insecurities. And your words do not need to be limited to her appearance. This vulnerable time together is also a chance to speak encouraging words over her life. Sometimes, she may want to share her day with you or discuss what is on her mind. Stay attuned to her needs, responding with empathy and interest.

When the shower is over, continue caring for her. Wrap her in her towel and use your towel to gently dry her, offering to brush her hair or massage lotion onto her skin. But do not forget that the goal is to deepen your connection and show her that her well-being matters to you.

DATE

It might seem surprising to include “going on dates” as part of a consistent set of practices, but that is precisely the point—it should be. The concept of a date should never be forgotten or neglected in your relationship, as doing so signals that you take your wife for granted.

Think back to why you started dating your wife in the first place. You pursued her intentionally, planning times when you could be alone to get to know her better and grow your connection through fun, memorable experiences. You put in the effort, spared no expense, looked your best, and gave her your undivided attention. You were trying to win her over, showing her how much she meant to you by going above and beyond.

Here is the secret: your wife never wanted that attention to stop—and neither did you. Yet, over time, many couples let the rhythm of life make dating seem like a chore. It becomes easy to fall into routines where putting effort into a date feels like work rather than something to anticipate. Add kids and busy schedules to the mix, and it is easy to forget what dating even looked like. If that is where you are, it is time to refresh your dating mindset. Stop using your circumstances as an excuse, get a sitter, and get back out there!

Every couple must consistently return to that place of intention where they remember what it felt like to pursue each other. This mindset changes how both husband and wife interact—they dress a little nicer, seek out unexplored places, share experiences, and come home feeling reconnected and excited. Neglecting the practice of dating can be detrimental. Yes, you can still have a good relationship, staying in and relaxing at home, but the purpose of a date is to step out of your comfort zone and bond through shared experiences. These moments create a sense of adventure and deepen your relationship.

When planning a date, be intentional. It does not have to be complicated, but make sure it fosters connection. For example, going to a movie is okay if paired with dinner or an activity where you can talk and engage with each other beforehand. Sitting silently at a movie theater without conversation is too similar to sitting on your couch at home. Prioritize creating space to communicate and connect. Even if

it feels awkward initially, give it time—conversations will start to flow, just as they did when you first began dating. Remember, there is a reason those early dates led you to where you are now. Channel that same spirit each time you plan a date.

Treat your wife like royalty. Chivalry is not dead, showing it is a powerful way to give love and respect. Do not fall into the trap of thinking that being considerate and chivalrous is outdated or that refusing to open doors makes you more progressive or respectful. Be a man who honors his wife with acts of kindness and care. Dress up, smell good, open her car door, hold doors open, walk with her, wait for her, help her into her chair at the restaurant, and give her your jacket when she is cold, even if you are freezing too. Show her in every moment that she is valuable and cherished. A date is about making her feel special, reminding her that she is worth every effort, and showing that you are still as eager to pursue her as you were initially. Get out there and win your wife's heart again and again.

ANNIVERSARY TRIP

Closely related to the idea of regular dating is the anniversary trip. Far too many couples treat their anniversary as the one special night of the year when they go out for a date, but that is not enough! We have already discussed how dating should be a regular part of your relationship. Additionally, getting away for your anniversary should also be a regular practice. Now, this does not have to mean an elaborate, expensive vacation. The key is dedicating time completely free from distractions and focused on each other.

An anniversary trip can happen anywhere—a grand getaway or a simple staycation at home. The most essential element is the time devoted exclusively to pursuing intimacy. A busy vacation packed with activities and an exhausting itinerary might be less valuable than a staycation full of quiet moments, relaxation, and reflection. The goal is not to check off sights or activities but to experience a relational renewal.

I cherish our anniversary each year because my wife and I dedicate at least three days to celebrate and reconnect. During this time, we focus on being deeply intimate and intentional with each other. We reflect on God's purposes for our lives and acknowledge how far we have come in our current season. We discuss His will for our future, share our dreams, express our hopes and desires, and enjoy moments

of laughter. We also try new activities together, indulge a little, and spend long, meaningful moments in our room, prioritizing each other.

We make it a point to behave as if no one else exists during these days. This annual reset for our relationship helps cultivate a closeness that sets a positive tone for the year ahead.

Do not underestimate the power of this kind of dedicated time. Every couple needs it. If you have children, ask family members or trusted friends to help make it happen. Your kids will be fine without you for a few days—God made them resilient, and your investment in your marriage helps them, too. Eliminate all excuses for putting this off. Prioritize it. Intentional space like this is crucial for growth, and an anniversary trip offers the perfect opportunity to nurture and strengthen your relationship.

At this point, many people—especially parents—might be shaking their heads, thinking that taking this kind of time is impossible. But the real barrier is not that you cannot find a way to make it happen. Where there is a will, there is a way. The barrier is often personal guilt from stepping away from those who need you. Spending that much quality time with your spouse can feel selfish, even indulgent. But that thinking is dangerous and deceptive and comes straight from the enemy.

Satan will try to convince you throughout your marriage that time spent with your spouse is unproductive or wasteful, especially if that time involves lounging around and “doing nothing.” But that is a lie. Time spent with your spouse is never wasted. It is one of the wisest, most productive investments you can make because it strengthens the foundation of your relationship. Remember, God’s purposes for marriage are best accomplished by a couple who walks in a deep, intimate connection. If that means dedicating hours to “unproductive” moments of connection, then so be it.

Do not let the enemy rob you of your joy or convince you that investing in your marriage is a distraction from God’s work. On the contrary, nurturing intimacy with your spouse equips you both to be more unified and effective for God’s Kingdom. Prioritize this time without guilt, knowing that it is productive and essential.

COFFEE TIME

You do not have to be a coffee enthusiast to enjoy “coffee time.” It could be any

drink, snack, or comfort you both enjoy. The idea is to set aside 15 to 30 minutes daily to reconnect with your wife. I am fortunate to work from home, so finding this time with my wife is relatively easy. This might be more difficult for those with long commutes or demanding jobs. But that makes it even more meaningful when you try to carve out time for her during the day—whether for coffee, lunch, or a quick snack. The goal is to break up your day and fill that moment with her.

This practice shows your wife that she is a priority over your career or other daily pursuits. It communicates that she is so valuable to you that you cannot help but make time in your busy schedule to see her. It is a simple yet impactful way to make her feel cherished and remind her that she is always on your mind.

To create a unique coffee time, start by preparing something for her. Make the coffee, bring a favorite snack, or write a note to uplift her. Preparing these things yourself shows your thoughtfulness and reinforces her importance to you.

Next, choose a comfortable spot for your time together. If you are at home, find where she feels most at ease. If you are meeting outside, consider places she loves—a cozy seat in her favorite café, a quiet bench in a park, or even the comfort of the car's air conditioning. The key is to make sure she feels relaxed and free from distractions.

During coffee time, you will engage in much of the same kind of communication as you would on a walk together. However, the difference here is that you are sitting, which allows for a closer physical connection. Sit side by side or across from her and make physical contact—hold her hand, brush her hair back, or offer a gentle foot or shoulder rub. Mix conversation and prayer with touches that convey your affection.

Do not be afraid to interrupt the conversation to compliment her. It should come naturally as if you cannot hold it back. For example, let yourself get lost in her eyes while she is talking. When she pauses and asks you why you are looking at her funny, use that moment to say something sincere like, “I just can’t get over how beautiful your eyes are.” Instead of being annoyed that you were not paying attention to her words, she will be delighted that you were captivated by her presence.

Some might think that these gestures sound like manipulation. They are not if they are genuine. If you mean what you say and act with sincerity, it is an expression of

love, not a tactic. You may not be the type of man to be mesmerized by your wife's eyes today, but with prayer and practice, you will find genuine admiration growing over time. My wife captured my affection in our early years, but that affection has multiplied tenfold as God has opened my eyes to her beauty and how He works in her life. You will find that He can do the same for you.

Try to see your wife as often as possible during the day. It will build intimacy and give you renewed energy for whatever comes next. A moment of encouragement and love from your spouse can be an enormous boost to your mood and productivity. Plus, her perspective can offer valuable insight when you are navigating challenges. Invest this time into your relationship, and you will find it enriches your marriage and your entire day.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

As we approach the end of this chapter, I hope you see the common threads running through these practices. Each activity centers on deliberate, shared moments communicating love, care, and attention. We must realize that we do not always need to build intimacy through grand gestures alone but through consistent, thoughtful investments of time and effort. Through each activity, you show your wife that she is more important than work, distractions, or daily routines.

As you have seen throughout this book, building intimacy requires putting your spouse's needs and desires above your own, showing her that she is cherished. We must remember that love is not passive but active and intentional. Make an effort.

Chapter Seventeen

Sexual Intimacy

You may be confused—and understandably so. Those of us who have grown up in the aftermath of the sexual revolution of the 1960s face the same timeless temptations as prior generations. Still, we do so in an environment far more saturated with sexual content. No era in history has been as inundated with sexual imagery and messaging as ours. This is due to the advent of modern technology. Television, the Internet, and smartphones have made access to pornography and sexualized content effortless.

We now live in an age where explicit images are just a click away, where virtual encounters can be bought with ease, and where dating apps are often used as platforms for casual sex. There are even websites explicitly designed to facilitate extramarital affairs. It has become impossible to browse even basic news sites without encountering many ads displaying partial nudity or provocative imagery.

While the temptations are not new, the ease of access is without precedent. This cultural shift has brought with it attitudes that deeply undermine a biblical understanding of sex. These include reducing sex to a mere physical act governed solely by mutual consent, promoting sexual experimentation as an expression of personal freedom, equating sexual preferences with identity, and fostering a mindset that encourages sex without responsibility—particularly for men.

This is the culture in which many of us have grown up, and its influence is pervasive. My awakening to the level of pervasiveness came while reading Ben Shapiro's book,

*Porn Generation*⁵². Shapiro skillfully lays out how society has become desensitized to the damaging effects of sexualization, beginning at an early age. As I read, I recognized myself in the very culture he described.

Like so many others, I was exposed to pornography at an incredibly early age, long before I was equipped to process it. Many of us carry the silent weight of these cultural influences, which have inevitably shaped—and often distorted—our understanding of sexual intimacy within marriage.

In this chapter, we will examine what the Bible teaches about sex, why it is vital for your marriage, and how embracing a scriptural perspective can bring healing and a renewed understanding of intimacy with your spouse.

THE FUNCTION OF SEX

Do you remember our discussion about function and design? If God created the world, then everything within it—including sex—has both an intended function (purpose) and design. For some, it may be difficult to reconcile the idea that God created sex. Our culture has so corrupted the concept that sex can feel dirty or inherently sinful. Attributing its design to a holy God might even seem sacrilegious. But the reality is that a holy and righteous God did invent sex—and I can assure you, He will not apologize for it.

We can better understand this by considering an alternative. God could have designed procreation in a way that was far more “tame.” For example, He could have made the process as simple as holding hands for a prolonged period. Yet, in His profound wisdom, God chose to make sex the most intimate and engaging practice two people can share. It is an act that holds nothing back. Sex engages our physical, emotional, and spiritual faculties in a way that fosters a unity of body and soul.

During sexual intimacy, husband and wife express a deep mutual understanding: they see, know, and desire each other at a level so deep that they willingly engage in an act that defies logic. Two otherwise calm, rational people willingly share a vulnerable, exclusive side of themselves that they would never expose to anyone else. It is so personal that even discussing it with others might cause embarrassment. Yet, for married couples in healthy relationships, this vulnerability is not only acceptable—

it is desired. This stays true even long after the prospect of children has passed, indicating that God's design for sex extends beyond procreation (though having children should also be something couples are open to).

If, therefore, the primary function of marriage is to formalize the male-female construct through a lifelong union, who together steward the earth in collaboration with God, then the purpose of sex is to foster intimate unity between husband and wife.

The function of sex is to unify husband and wife, preparing them for the collective work God has called them to do in the world. Through this astounding and surprising act of intimacy, married couples are strengthened for the mission of stewarding creation, loving one another, glorifying God, and bringing children into the world together.

THE DESIGN OF SEX

If the purpose of sex is unity, one might assume this unity could occur in any relationship humanity imagines. Yet the Bible is clear: sex is reserved for one context alone—marriage.

THIS EXPLAINS WHY A MAN LEAVES HIS FATHER AND MOTHER AND IS JOINED TO HIS WIFE, AND THE TWO ARE UNITED INTO ONE. GENESIS 2:24, NLT

This verse not only establishes the design of marriage but also defines the proper context for sexual relations. Nowhere in Scripture—whether explicitly or implicitly—does God affirm any other kind of sexual relationship as part of His design. Without engaging in hermeneutical gymnastics, any honest seeker will see that the Bible consistently upholds marriage as the sole context for sexual intimacy. Scripture repeatedly warns against departing from this design, offering commands and teachings that warn against such behavior (see Genesis 2:24; Exodus 20:14; Leviticus 18:20; Proverbs 5:18–19; Matthew 5:27–28; Matthew 19:4–6; 1 Corinthians 6:18; 1 Corinthians 7:2; Ephesians 5:3; Hebrews 13:4).

When you consider the function of both sex and marriage, this exclusivity makes sense. The purpose of marriage is to reflect God's holistic image in the world, and sex is a physical manifestation of this purpose.

Sex physically demonstrates the complementary design of males and females. The human body itself reflects this truth—males and females are designed for physical connection with one another. This connection cannot be achieved naturally or appropriately between members of the same sex.

Spiritually, sex unites the souls of a man and a woman within the covenant of marriage. This sacred unity can only occur between two individuals who are wholly committed to one another. Any violation of this covenant—through adultery, sexual perversion, or selfish gratification—damages or destroys this unity because it cannot be shared.

Whenever a new construct is introduced into God's one-to-one design, the very essence of marriage is corrupted. Marriage represents Christ's relationship with the Church: one Son and one Church for all eternity. Adultery, sexual immorality, and other distortions of God's plan destroy this sacred representation.

It is also critical to note that personal gratification lies outside of God's purposes for sexual desire. If the purpose of sex is unity between male and female, removing one side of the equation does not fulfill that purpose. Pursuing sexual gratification alone degrades the act of sex into mere physical pleasure. While physical pleasure is part of God's design, it is not the primary purpose of sex—unity is. Self-gratification reduces sex to a selfish act, violating both the body and the soul. For who can keep their mind pure while engaging in such an act? If your wife is not the one awakening and fulfilling your sexual desires, what—or who—is?

Pornography, prostitution, and affairs are incredibly destructive. They violate the covenant you made with your wife—before God as witness—and the sanctity of your own body, which is the temple of the Holy Spirit (Malachi 2:14; 1 Corinthians 6:19–20). Such actions grieve the Spirit, limiting His power to work in and through you (James 5:16). They also corrupt your soul and natural desires. With its spiritual faculties, your soul connects with whatever spirit is behind what you consume. There are spiritual forces behind pornography, prostitution, and illicit affairs, and their influence negatively affects your disposition, mood, and moral judgment.

Did you realize that your sexual desire and attention belong to your wife? Your sex drive, along with your body, is not merely yours—it is a unique form of attention

intended to edify her. When directed appropriately, it communicates that she is the standard of beauty and desire in your life. She will feel this pouring out of your spirit, a deep love that naturally expresses itself in physical passion.

When you give that attention to someone else or gratify it through other means, you rob her of something that belongs to her alone. Imagine if the situation were reversed. Would you want her to give her sexual desire to another person, digital or real, stealing from you what is exclusively yours?

BIBLICAL SEX

The Bible has a positive view of sex between husband and wife. Created by God, sex is portrayed in Scripture as a good and beautiful gift to enjoy and celebrate. The Bible encourages marital intimacy, and one only must read its pages to see this affirmation. But how should we approach biblical sex?

WORSHIPFUL SEX

Sex should be an act of worship—not worship of your spouse, but worship of the God who created her. Worship is not confined to what we do on Sunday mornings. In his letter to the Romans, Paul writes:

**I APPEAL TO YOU THEREFORE, BROTHERS, BY THE MERCIES OF
GOD, TO PRESENT YOUR BODIES AS A LIVING SACRIFICE, HOLY AND
ACCEPTABLE TO GOD, WHICH IS YOUR SPIRITUAL WORSHIP. ROMANS
12:1 ESV**

This verse opens Paul's practical instructions to the church in Rome, encouraging them to live as "*living sacrifices*" in every aspect of life. Worship should permeate everything we say, think, and do. We were created to thank God for all things and to glorify Him because He is worthy. Sex is no exception. Sex can be an incredible act of worship, as it engages our whole selves—body and soul.

Consider the way worship often engages both our bodies and souls in the context of church rituals. When we sing corporately, we clap, raise our hands, jump, dance, and even shout in adoration of God while meditating on the truths we sing. In prayer, we bow our heads, speak to God, and listen for His voice. In communion, we eat the bread and drink the cup, reflecting Christ's sacrifice. These rituals stir

us and draw us closer to God—not because He was ever distant, but because we are finally turning to focus on Him.

Likewise, sex should be approached worshipfully. While all things can be acts of worship, some actions—like prayer, singing, and communion—engage us at deeper levels. Sex is among these more profound acts.

Approaching sex worshipfully means coming to it with reverence, excitement, joy, and passion. We should never reduce it to a means of satisfying physical urges. Sex is far more spiritual than that—or at least it should be. Worshiping God through intimacy with your spouse involves several key elements:

- **Elevating:** Worshipful sex elevates your wife and never degrades her. Your words and actions should make her feel beautiful, cherished, and glorious. Avoid vulgarity or anything that cheapens her. Reject the world's training in this regard. Instead, affirm her dignity and worth as the one God has given to you.
- **Unselfish:** Worshipful sex is focused on pleasing your wife, not yourself. Your goal should be to learn what she enjoys and to meet her needs while she does the same for you. True worshipful intimacy resembles two people joyfully trying to outdo one another in love and service.
- **Engaging:** Both husband and wife should be active participants. This does not mean both must always engage in mutual physical pleasure—there may be times when one spouse gives a gift to the other out of love when they are not “feeling it.” However, even in these instances, both should freely and lovingly participate. Taking sexual pleasure through compulsion or manipulation is not worshipful and violates the spirit of biblical intimacy.
- **Joyful:** Worshipful sex is filled with joy and gratitude to God. Approach sex with excitement, anticipation, and overwhelming thankfulness for the gift it is. Never take this precious gift for granted.

By approaching sex in these ways, marital intimacy becomes an act of worship that honors both your spouse and your Creator. It engages body, mind, and soul, drawing you closer to your spouse while giving glory to God—the One who designed this extraordinary gift.

SEXUAL FREQUENCY

One of the most challenging aspects of marriage for many men is the frequency of sexual intimacy with their wives⁵³. Research indicates that men have stronger sex drives than women, reflected in differences in sexual thoughts, desires, and initiation behaviors⁵⁴. You may think, *I do not need a study to tell me that*. This reality has been apparent for many men—including myself—since the first year of marriage. As men, we are often ready for intimacy at a moment's notice, triggered by as little as a glance from our wives. When reality does not align with our natural drive, it can lead to frustration, discouragement, and even tension within the relationship.

Why Do Men Have Higher Sex Drives?

Women, by comparison, tend to be less preoccupied with sexual activity. While men might think about sex multiple times a day, many women can go about their day without thinking about it at all—at least until their husband brings it up. Why is this the case? Researchers suggest various biological and cultural factors, including the impact of a sex-obsessed culture that inflates men's desires. Yet, the best explanation is straightforward: God designed it that way.

But why? Why did God create men with such a strong sex drive, particularly when women's drive is often lower? Scripture does not give a definitive answer, but clues may lie in the differences between men and women.

For example, men often have fewer emotionally intimate relationships. Male friendships tend to be activity-based rather than built on deep emotional sharing, whereas women's friendships usually involve vulnerability and mutual support⁵⁵. Many men struggle with emotional vulnerability, suppressing the need for connection to the point that they may not even recognize it. How often have you heard a man say, "I don't need anyone"? And how many men do you know with multiple deep friendships? I know very few.

Sex as a Pathway to Emotional Connection

Given men's tendency to stay at a surface level emotionally, sex may serve as a pathway to the emotional support they need. Research supports that men are likelier to share their feelings with women than other men⁵⁶. For married men, this emotional sharing should be reserved for their wives. Close emotional connections

outside of marriage can lead to inappropriate attachments and temptations.

Interestingly, after physical intimacy, men often find it easier to open up emotionally. Women, however, tend to approach this differently: emotional connection frequently leads to physical intimacy. For men, sex fosters emotional vulnerability. For women, emotional vulnerability fosters the desire for sex. This dynamic reflects God's design, encouraging both spouses to grow toward a more complete form of intimacy—engaging both body and soul. Men, driven by physical connection, are encouraged toward emotional intimacy. Women, driven by emotional connection, are drawn into physical intimacy. Together, this interplay draws spouses toward holistic unity.

Considering this, it becomes clear that God created men's higher sex drives not merely for physical pleasure but to foster deeper emotional and spiritual connection within marriage. Your sex drive is not an undesirable thing—it is a gift from God, designed for His purposes. Problems arise when you direct your sexual desires outside of your marriage. When a man focuses on satisfying his sexual urges through other means—pornography, extramarital relationships, or even selfishness within the marriage bed—he robs his wife of what is rightfully hers. He introduces temptations that can destroy the relationship.

Seasons of detachment in marriage often begin when a man stops sacrificially loving his wife and prioritizes his own needs. Small acts of selfishness grow into more significant issues, and over time, couples may find themselves on the path to divorce, wondering where things went wrong. Do not let that happen. Stop doing anything that harms your relationship and begin the challenging work of loving your wife selflessly once again.

Lead with Generosity

The Bible speaks directly to the topic of sexual frequency in marriage. Paul writes:

THE HUSBAND SHOULD GIVE TO HIS WIFE HER CONJUGAL RIGHTS,
AND LIKEWISE THE WIFE TO HER HUSBAND. FOR THE WIFE DOES NOT
HAVE AUTHORITY OVER HER OWN BODY, BUT THE HUSBAND DOES.
LIKEWISE THE HUSBAND DOES NOT HAVE AUTHORITY OVER HIS
OWN BODY, BUT THE WIFE DOES. DO NOT DEPRIVE ONE ANOTHER,
EXCEPT PERHAPS BY AGREEMENT FOR A LIMITED TIME, THAT YOU MAY

**DEVOTE YOURSELVES TO PRAYER; BUT THEN COME TOGETHER AGAIN,
SO THAT SATAN MAY NOT TEMPT YOU BECAUSE OF YOUR LACK OF
SELF-CONTROL. 1 CORINTHIANS 7:3–5 ESV**

This passage is often misinterpreted as granting one spouse the right to demand sex. However, Paul's instruction is not about selfish demands but mutual generosity. Both spouses should be selfless, seeking to fulfill each other's needs out of love and care.

Generosity in sexual intimacy involves prioritizing your spouse's desires and preferences. For men, this means exercising self-control and being sensitive to your wife's needs. For women, it means intentionally creating space and time for intimacy. Both partners should strive to serve one another in ways that foster connection rather than pursuing personal gratification.

When you prioritize relational connection over physical pleasure, you naturally experience greater frequency of intimacy. Acts of service—like doing chores, lightening your wife's load, or simply being attentive to her emotional needs—can pave the way for a deeper connection by offloading tasks and creating empty space to connect.

Your wife will be most open to sexual intimacy when she feels relaxed and free from other concerns. Even then, she may need time to ease into the moment. Be patient and focus on awakening desire within her rather than rushing in. Patience is not only beneficial for her—it's good for you as well. Intimacy is far more fulfilling when you slow down and fully engage in every aspect of the experience. While not every encounter needs to follow this approach, it is often the most meaningful and enjoyable for you both.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

In a culture that often distorts the purpose of sex, it is vital to return to God's design. Sex within marriage is not simply about physical pleasure; it is a gift intended to deepen unity between husband and wife, helping them better reflect His image and bring Him glory. When we approach sex with reverence, selflessness, and a desire to honor God, it becomes an act of worship and strengthens the bond that He intended marriage to embody.

The goal is not to let physical desire control us but to channel it toward building

intimacy and connection that glorifies God. Pursue unity with your wife by loving her sacrificially and seeking her good.

Chapter Eighteen

Closing Thoughts

Many of us have heard the story of Cain and Abel. These two brothers each brought an offering to God—Cain from his crops and Abel from his firstborn flocks. By contrasting their gifts, Genesis 4 suggests that Abel's offering was better than Cain's. This could indicate a difference in quality or simply in the spirit in which it was given. Regardless, God was pleased with Abel but had no regard for Cain. In response, Cain became angry, and God gave him the following warning:

THE LORD SAID TO CAIN, "WHY ARE YOU ANGRY, AND WHY HAS YOUR FACE FALLEN? IF YOU DO WELL, WILL YOU NOT BE ACCEPTED? AND IF YOU DO NOT DO WELL, SIN IS CROUCHING AT THE DOOR. ITS DESIRE IS CONTRARY TO YOU, BUT YOU MUST RULE OVER IT." GENESIS 4:6-7 ESV

God knew that Cain's anger over being rejected would eventually turn toward his brother Abel. Spoiler alert—Cain ultimately murdered Abel over this very incident. Instead of addressing the shortcomings in his own heart, he blamed the person closest to him and took out his pain and anger on him.

By now, you have likely realized that the "fight" referenced in the title of this book is not about battling your spouse—it is about the battle within yourself. If you finish reading this book still believing that marriage is merely about two people trying to get along, then you have missed the point. The true challenge is not tolerating one another—it is surrendering the selfish desires and corruptions of your own heart, replacing them with God's wisdom, courage, and strength to answer His higher call.

Your natural inclination, reinforced by the world, is to live a small, self-focused

life, feeding personal pleasures, ego, or selfish ambitions. Like Cain, sin is always crouching at the door, seeking to conquer and harm us. But we are called to rule over it. We must trade a selfish, tit-for-tat approach to life, and marriage—where fairness is the goal—for a life of surrender to God's justice, mercy, and humility.

Surrendering to God feels counterintuitive and even counterproductive. How can we have a happy life and marriage if we are not focused on meeting our own needs and wants? God's path is difficult to walk because we often lack the faith to believe it will actually work. Yet Scripture warns us:

THERE IS A WAY THAT SEEMS RIGHT TO A MAN, BUT ITS END IS THE
WAY TO DEATH. PROVERBS 14:12 ESV

God's ways feel counterintuitive because they are higher than our own. They seem counterproductive because we struggle to imagine a relationship rooted in anything but mutual benefit. Our culture teaches us: *I will stay with you as long as you continue to make me feel loved, accepted, and respected.* But that is not the Kingdom way Jesus came to establish.

Jesus brought an upside-down Kingdom that only makes sense once we experience it and see its fruit. As I hope this book has shown, when you strive for something in your own way instead of God's, you often never attain it—or if you do, it is a disappointing shadow of what you imagined. But when you pursue God and follow His wisdom, you often receive what you were originally after in abundance, with far greater satisfaction.

I know it is hard to see how laying down your life in sacrificial love will improve your marriage. But I promise you—it will. I know you may struggle to believe that letting go of offense and forgiving quickly will benefit you. But it will. We do not always see how God is going to move, but He will—if we patiently endure like the saints before us.

Abraham was not certain that God would give him a son, but he believed and never gave up hope. David was not certain he would become king while hiding in the wilderness from Saul, but he trusted God's plan. Daniel did not know if God would spare him from the lions, but he knelt and prayed anyway.

Uncertainty about God's ways is never an excuse for disobedience. Neither is certainty about hardship.

Josiah was certain God would keep His promise to destroy Judah for their wickedness, but that did not stop him from trying to change God's mind through zealous actions. Paul was certain he would be captured and imprisoned in Jerusalem—but he went anyway. Jesus was certain He would be betrayed, beaten, and crucified—but He came anyway.

What I hope you are beginning to understand is that your life is not ultimately about you— it is about God. You are still on this earth for one purpose: to build His Kingdom. Yes, God cares about your personal happiness and well-being. But He also cares deeply about the eternal souls He brings into your life. And when He brings people into your life, what will they find? A dim, flickering light, barely shining? Or a bright beacon illuminating the path to Him?

Even if every selfish desire you have were fulfilled, it would pale in comparison to the joy of being used by God to draw another soul into His Kingdom. And in marriage, you get to do that work every single day.

The number one soul God has entrusted to your care is your wife. The moment you said I do, every other relationship became secondary to your mission of leading her to Christ and helping her flourish as He designed. If forsaking everything else meant leading your wife closer to God, it would not be too great a cost. And yet, the beauty of God's design is that when we obey Him, we do not have to choose—He provides the rest. He is faithful to bring provision, wisdom, joy, and peace when we trust Him.

In the end, life is far simpler than we make it. Goals, dreams, and aspirations are good, but they are not the primary point of our existence. Walking with God is. In Him is everything we could ever need. He wants to pour Himself into you so that you, in turn, can pour Him into those around you—beginning with your wife.

Lay down your life, and you will find that in doing so, you gain more than you could ever ask, hope, or imagine.

CLOSING THOUGHTS

NOW ALL GLORY TO GOD, WHO IS ABLE, THROUGH HIS MIGHTY
POWER AT WORK WITHIN US, TO ACCOMPLISH INFINITELY MORE
THAN WE MIGHT ASK OR THINK. EPHESIANS 3:20 NLT

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Endnotes

CHAPTER 1 ENDNOTES

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7 That is not to say that singleness is not also a desirable choice. Indeed, for some men, being single will be a more appropriate heavenly gift than marriage because of how God desires to use them.

8 While helpful, this analogy is also imperfect, as God never needed to strategize or plan in the way humans understand these processes. He is omniscient

and fully aware of all things past, present, future, and possible. Yet even this imprecise way of thinking can aid our understanding of fundamental concepts. So, for the sake of comprehension, let us imagine that God had to plan out the universe.

9 See the Book of Job Chapters 38 through 40.

CHAPTER 2 ENDNOTES

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20 In thinking about gender difference, it may bring up questions regarding traditional gender roles. I originally had the following text in the main portion of the book, but ultimately found it to be distracting to the primary point which I was making: *Yes, this is an important topic in which there is much confusion. Exploring the differences between the sexes reveals why traditional gender roles matter. The majority of men and women will experience greater joy and contentment when they pursue the roles and behaviors inspired by their God-given nature. Traditional gender roles are patterns built across the ages that align roles to nature. These enduring patterns offer valuable insights into what can bring both men and women a deep sense of happiness and fulfillment. Tradition is not just a relic of the past but a key to understanding and living out the divine design in ways that enrich and satisfy our lives.*

At the same time, we should acknowledge that not every man or woman will fit neatly within traditional roles—and that's not necessarily a problem. There are some who, by personality, calling, or circumstance, will find great meaning and fruitfulness in breaking from those roles. These exceptions do not invalidate the pattern; rather, they confirm it by contrast. The important thing is that marriage remains a partnership—a covenantal union between man and woman that reflects mutual love, respect, and self-giving. Within that framework, roles may vary, but the deeper spiritual unity remains the same.

It's also worth noting that traditional roles, especially in how they are portrayed

or executed, are often mischaracterized by popular society. They are sometimes viewed through the lens of oppression or rigid hierarchy. But when we look to Scripture rather than cultural distortions, we find that biblical roles are rooted in service, sacrifice, and complementarity—not dominance or inequality. A biblical view of headship and help is not about superiority or subordination, but about modeling Christlike love and mutual support. These roles, when rightly understood and lived out, can be sources of strength, beauty, and joy.

So while we need not enforce rigid expectations, neither should we disregard the wisdom of tradition. Most men are likely to find greater satisfaction in living out roles that align with their nature as men, and most women likewise as women. Honoring this general pattern, without denying individual variations, helps us better appreciate both the beauty of God's design and the grace He gives in each unique story.

21 I hope you can understand that this is why Christians cannot budge on the issue of transgenderism. Trust me, it would be easier for us if we could. However, Christians cannot compromise on God's design or His holiness. Our belief that gender is binary and not on a spectrum is rooted in what the Bible teaches us about God's design of humanity. To modify this is to violate our trust in His perfection. My heart goes out to people struggling with gender dysphoria. I realize it is a long-term identity struggle that isn't just removed simply because someone wants it to be. Yet I believe that God can provide hope, healing, and peace for all persons in the midst of this struggle.

CHAPTER 3 ENDNOTES

22 What about single people? Under this view, single individuals are not excluded. Singleness can serve as another mechanism for fulfilling God's purposes. This perspective is readily affirmed, especially since the next time this verse is referenced in scripture is by Jesus Himself. He employs it not only to reinforce the institution of marriage but also to honor those who are single and working for the Kingdom, highlighting the value and importance of both states in achieving God's overarching plans.

HE ANSWERED, "HAVE YOU NOT READ THAT HE WHO CREATED THEM FROM THE BEGINNING MADE THEM MALE AND FEMALE, AND SAID,

'THEREFORE A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND HIS MOTHER AND HOLD FAST TO HIS WIFE, AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH'? SO THEY ARE NO LONGER TWO BUT ONE FLESH. WHAT THEREFORE GOD HAS JOINED TOGETHER, LET NOT MAN SEPARATE." MATTHEW 19:4-6 ESV

Here, Jesus authoritatively confirms the institution of marriage as designed by God, emphasizing the partnership between one man and one woman for life. Furthermore, He elaborates on this by reinforcing that husband and wife become one flesh and that it is God who orchestrates these unions. However, in response to a comment from His disciples, Jesus also acknowledges and affirms individuals working outside of marriage for God's Kingdom, recognizing their contributions and roles in fulfilling God's purposes.

THE DISCIPLES SAID TO HIM, "IF SUCH IS THE CASE OF A MAN WITH HIS WIFE, IT IS BETTER NOT TO MARRY." BUT HE SAID TO THEM, "NOT EVERYONE CAN RECEIVE THIS SAYING, BUT ONLY THOSE TO WHOM IT IS GIVEN. FOR THERE ARE EUNUCHS WHO HAVE BEEN SO FROM BIRTH, AND THERE ARE EUNUCHS WHO HAVE BEEN MADE EUNUCHS BY MEN, AND THERE ARE EUNUCHS WHO HAVE MADE THEMSELVES EUNUCHS FOR THE SAKE OF THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN. LET THE ONE WHO IS ABLE TO RECEIVE THIS RECEIVE IT." MATTHEW 19:10-12 ESV

Jesus acknowledges that some individuals are called to remain single, making "themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven." God uses single people to carry out incredible tasks for God's Kingdom, some of which might be impossible for those who are married. Yet, Jesus notes this calling as a rare one, saying, "not everyone can receive this saying, but only those to whom it is given." This suggests that while singleness is indeed a gift, it is a comparatively uncommon one, with the primary human orientation leaning towards marriage. We are intrinsically designed with a natural predisposition towards forming marital unions.

The consistent portrayal of marriage in Scripture—from creation to covenant, affirmed by Christ, and echoed in the New Testament—suggests that humans are indeed designed with a natural predisposition toward forming marital unions. This design reflects both our relational nature and God's purposes for companionship,

procreation, and reflecting His covenantal love. See:

- Genesis 1:27-28, where God creates humanity as male and female with the command to “*be fruitful and multiply*”
- Genesis 2:18, 24, which states that it is not good for man to be alone and describes marriage as a “*one flesh*” union;
- Ephesians 5:31-32, where Paul reveals marriage as a reflection of Christ’s covenantal love for the Church;
- Matthew 19:4-6, where Jesus affirms marriage as God’s design from creation;
- Proverbs 18:22, which describes marriage as a blessing and favor from God;
- 1 Corinthians 7:2, which addresses marriage as a God-honoring outlet for human desires;
- Genesis 1:27, which connects humanity’s relational nature to being made in the image of God.

Two truths can coexist: Marriage may serve as God’s primary mechanism for establishing His rule and reign on earth, and at the same time, single individuals can reflect God’s image in unique ways that married couples cannot.

23 The Holy Spirit is not an ethereal presence or a part of God; the Holy Spirit is God, not an “it” but a “He.”

24 Husbands are especially tasked with the sanctification of their marriages. Paul explains it to the church in Ephesus like this:

HUSBANDS, LOVE YOUR WIVES, AS CHRIST LOVED THE CHURCH AND GAVE HIMSELF UP FOR HER, THAT HE MIGHT SANCTIFY HER, HAVING CLEANSED HER BY THE WASHING OF WATER WITH THE WORD, SO THAT HE MIGHT PRESENT THE CHURCH TO HIMSELF IN SPLENDOR, WITHOUT SPOT OR WRINKLE OR ANY SUCH THING, THAT SHE MIGHT BE HOLY AND WITHOUT BLEMISH. EPHESIANS 5:25-27 ESV

God tasks Husbands with “cleansing” their wives through the “washing of water with the word.” This directive encompasses more than just reading Scripture with and to your wife. How do we know this? Because Jesus Christ’s ministry was characterized not only by His words and teachings but also by His actions. The phrase “gave himself up for her” signifies a sacrificial love, implying that Christ laid

down His life for the church to enable us to thrive and fulfill our purpose. Similarly, husbands are uniquely positioned to sacrifice themselves so they and their wives may experience sanctification.

]25 Even in the case of two people who do not follow Jesus this holds true. People in great marriages not following Jesus still have Him at the core of their marriage. Find a good marriage and you will see self-sacrifice and service at the center.

CHAPTER 4 ENDNOTES

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27 Piper, John, Tate, Kim, et al. *Happily Ever After: Finding Grace in the Messes of Marriage*. Minneapolis: Desiring God, 2018.

28 Piper, John, Tate, Kim, et al. *Happily Ever After: Finding Grace in the Messes of Marriage*. Minneapolis: Desiring God, 2018.

CHAPTER 5 ENDNOTES

29 You might think, wait, *isn't serving in church a good thing?* Yes! It is an exceptionally good thing. But even good things can become idols when pursued for the wrong reasons. Service to God through the church had become, for me, a means to an end rather than an act of worship.

30 J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1954)

CHAPTER 6 ENDNOTES

31 BibleProject, *BibleProject*, accessed April 29, 2025, <https://bibleproject.com/>.

32 The Ark of the Covenant symbolized the very presence of God to Israel. However, the Ark was temporarily captured by the Philistines after Israel treated it like a magical object, assuming it would guarantee victory in a battle they lost. When King David finally brought the Ark to Jerusalem, he was not just moving a

sacred artifact—he was symbolically inviting God to take His rightful place as the ultimate King over Israel. David brought God into the heart of the city where he ruled, acknowledging that his kingdom belonged to the Lord.

CHAPTER 7 ENDNOTES

33 This does not mean principles are to be applied in an absolute or inflexible way. There are situations where one principle must yield to a higher one. For example, it is good and right to support and encourage your wife in her goals and aspirations. However, if her desire is to pursue something unwholesome or contrary to God’s will, the higher principle of obeying and honoring God takes precedence. In such cases, adherence to the principle of loving encouragement must be set aside to uphold the greater principle of faithfulness to God.

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CHAPTER 8 ENDNOTES

37 Hillsong Worship. *I Surrender*. Recorded 2012. Track 7 on Cornerstone. Hillsong Music, 2012. MP3.

CHAPTER 10 ENDNOTES

38 Jenkins, Dallas, director. *The Chosen: Season 2, Episode 3, “Matthew 4:24”*. 5&2 Studios, 2021.

39 U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. “Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages.” Accessed December 28, 2024. <https://data.bls.gov/timeseries/TUU10101AA01013585>

CHAPTER 11 ENDNOTES

40 There are many verses that ask women to submit to their husbands leadership such as: Ephesians 5:22-24, Colossians 3:18, 1 Peter 3:1-6, Genesis 2:18, Titus 2:4-5, 1 Corinthians 11:3, Proverbs 31:11-12, Ephesians 5:25, 1 Peter 3:7. If God asks wives to do this, then it is reasonable to infer that He designed them to do it.

41 BibleProject. 2025. "Loyal Love." *Character of God Word Studies*. Accessed April 29, 2025. <https://bibleproject.com/videos/loyal-love/>.

CHAPTER 13 ENDNOTES

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43 Howard, Ron, director. *Cinderella Man*. Universal Pictures, 2005.

44 Hooper, Tom, director. *Les Misérables*. Universal Pictures, 2012.

45 Jenkins, Dallas, director. *The Chosen: Season 4, Episode 5, "Sitting, Serving, Scheming"*. 5&2 Studios, 2024.

46 Jackson, Peter, director. *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King*. New Line Cinema, 2003.

CHAPTER 14 ENDNOTES

47 Perhaps it is just me, but lately, I have heard more people focusing on David's failures over God's affirmations of him. If you struggle with the idea of honoring David, I would like you to take note that God mentions David four separate times as the reason He would not wholly destroy Judah (see 1 Kings 11:12-13, 32; 1 Kings 15:4; 2 Kings 8:19; Isaiah 37:35). Even more impressive is that the final reference is 250 years after David's reign. If God recognizes someone this way, we would be wise to notice.

48 Chapman, Gary. *The 5 Love Languages: The Secret to Love That Lasts*. Chicago: Northfield Publishing, 2015.

CHAPTER 15 ENDNOTES

49 Squires, Josh. 2016. "Marital Intimacy Is More Than Sex." *Desiring God*. March 2, 2016. <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/marital-intimacy-is-more-than-sex>

50 Harmony Healthcare IT. "Screen time addiction? The average American spends 4.5 hours per day on phone." NBC 10 News, January 22, 2024. <https://turnto10.com/i-team/consumer-advocate/screen-time-addiction-average-american-spends-four-hours-per-day-phone-younger-generation-reduce-laptops-notifications-january-22-2024>.

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CHAPTER 17 ENDNOTES

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