

14 PRAYERS *that will* CHANGE YOUR MARRIAGE FOREVER



A D A M H O U G E

14 Prayers That Will Change Your Marriage Forever™

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Introduction

Welcome to the rich and rewarding blessing of a God-centered marriage. Over the next fourteen days, you will be challenged to the core because you will be forced to examine yourself and your walk in Christ in a new and intense light. As you conform your marriage to God's biblical blueprint, the rewards will be infinite. However, major changes in life can require hard work and persistence, so expect to shed a little elbow grease as you learn to serve the Lord and your spouse with a renewed vitality.

Every change must begin with you. Whether your spouse may need to change more or less than you is irrelevant. God only changes those who are willing to be changed. If you change yourself, your spouse will follow. He or she will see the power of God's love working in you and will be drawn by conviction to change himself or herself as well.

Whether your marriage is struggling or amazing, these prayers will help you to fine-tune your relationship with your spouse. They will help you to get on track with the Lord's blueprint for marriage, which will forever change your life.

Over the next fourteen days, read each prayer and meditate on each study. Each study is your personal challenge to grow. Take the lessons to heart and begin to practice them. Each day, you must practice the concepts not only of that day but of all the previous days as well.

Although this book will take no more than fourteen days to read, the concepts will take a lifetime to master. Remember that it takes months to grow harvestable fruit from a plant. Expect changes in your marriage to take time as you continue in persistence. But stay in the fight, because God will win the battle for you. Self-discipline and faith are all you need.

Lord, Draw Me Nearer to You

The cause of most difficulties in a marriage is spiritual. The further your actions are from the Lord's, the further the wedge is driven into your marriage. But Jesus is the source and center of peace. So if you walk in His Spirit, He has the power to heal and restore your marriage.

He will heal your heart and heal your soul. All you need to do is become a better listener. Listen carefully to the voice of the Spirit and obey Him immediately. If you sensitize yourself to His voice, it will change your life: The more sensitive you are to His convictions, the more you'll walk in the love of God.

If Jesus is the center of your relationship, then the closer to God and the closer to each other you'll be. The more you draw near to the Lord, the more you'll become like Him. If you continually walk in the Spirit, you will bear the fruits of the Spirit. And what is the first fruit? Love.

Love cements every relationship and binds every heart together. If you're walking in the love of God, your marriage will be blessed naturally. But if you're walking in selfish desire or the nature of the flesh, your marriage will be cursed.

Examine your heart and ask yourself how you've been seeking the Lord lately. Have you been growing in Him as you should? Or have you been caught up with living life?

Have you been studying His word and growing in wisdom? Or has the 9 to 5 grind taken your attention away from the daily pursuit of wisdom?

Have you been practicing the love of God toward everyone around you? Or have you only been seeking how to further yourself or your family?

Have you been praying without ceasing as the Bible exhorts you to do? Or have you been satisfying the flesh with continual idle entertainment?

Have you been abiding in the Spirit and lifting up praise continually as the word commands you to do?

Do you know what it means to abide? Do you know when you're abiding and when you're not? If you don't know this, then take it to heart to learn immediately. You abide in the Spirit when you meditate on Him and His presence. This is best done through continual prayer and worship. If you're around a group of people or at work, then it can also be accomplished through godly,

edifying speech—such as a sermon or a conversation at Bible study—as the Holy Spirit guides your conversation.

When you feel the presence of God upon you, you're abiding in the Spirit. But when you don't feel His presence, then you're not abiding and are likely being idle, not focusing on Him, or sinning. All you have to do to remedy this is to refocus your thoughts on the Lord's presence and meditate on Him.

You can't serve God without God working in you and through you. As it is written,

“...for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.”
Philippians 2:13

If you want to live like Christ, then Jesus must be living not only in you but also through you. While you may have Christ in you, this doesn't mean He is always working through you. Consider sin, for example.

But God will work through you if you connect yourself to His Spirit. The Lord is always there, abiding with us, but we aren't always abiding in Him as we should. There are two types of abiding: Jesus abides in us and will never leave us or forsake us, but we are called to “abide back,” so to speak. As Jesus said,

“Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me.” John 15:4

In this statement, Jesus begins with the call to abide in Him. Then He breaks the concept of abiding into our abidance in Him and His abidance in us. He further says that the branch cannot bear fruit of itself. Having Christ and walking in Christ are two separate things. Just because you're connected to the vine doesn't mean you're opening yourself to the enriching nourishment of the vine.

If you don't continue to walk in the Spirit, you will not bear the fruit of the Spirit. Abiding in the Spirit of Christ isn't something you do naturally even if you're born again. Although the Spirit continuously abides in you, you aren't necessarily allowing the Spirit to work through you. It would be blasphemous to say you are operating in the Spirit during the moments when you're sinning, for example.

Lawrence of Arabia was famous for his exploits against the Turks in the Arab Revolt during World War One. During his campaigns, Lawrence acquired many friends among the leaders of the Arabs. After the war, he invited them to

England, where he wined and dined them and showed them the sights and sounds of the nation. He even introduced them to the queen and Parliament. But out of all the things the Arabs saw, they were most enamored by the faucets in the hotel. In the desert, obtaining water requires a lot of work, but with a faucet, water flows out of the spout at the turn of a knob. They had never seen anything like it!

For this reason, just before they left, they acquired some plumbing tools and tried to steal the faucets. Apparently, they were under the assumption that they would be bringing flowing water to the desert. Lawrence ultimately caught them and had to explain that the faucets were connected to pipes, which were connected to a water main, which led in turn to an already existing water source that England possessed but the desert did not. After a thorough explanation, the Arabs finally understood and aborted their mission.

A Christian who does not abide is no different from these Arabs. Just because God gave you a faucet doesn't mean it will work unless you attach it to the pipes. The works of God will never come from you if the Spirit is not flowing through you.

The water of God is always flowing, but if you're not hooked up to the source, you'll never be able to water the garden of your marriage. It doesn't matter how many times you turn a Christian on or off; unless you are plugged into the Spirit, nothing will work.

But does God really call us to work? Here is what Scripture tells us:

“Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling...” Philippians 2:12

Furthermore,

“And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works...” Hebrews 10:24

To this the Scriptures add,

“And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment...” Philippians 1:9

How can your love abound unless you work toward it? Showing love with a sincere heart isn't legalism. Truly, if there is any work to which a Christian is

called, it is the ongoing work of love. But this work is useless without the Spirit operating through you. We cannot love with the perfect love of God unless God is loving through us. As we also read,

“Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because as He is, so are we in this world.” 1 John 4:17

So the question is, “How are you practicing the love of God toward your spouse?” How are you allowing God to work through you? How do you know whether God truly has works in store for you?

We know this because it is written,

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

How do you know what works He’s calling you to do? Through the voice of God. The Holy Spirit is constantly speaking to you, but the question is, “Are you listening?” Obey the Spirit and listen to His voice, and you will walk in Him as you ought. As we also read,

“To this end I also labor, striving according to His working which works in me mightily.” Colossians 1:29

Listen to God and take it to heart to strive according to His working. Devoting yourself to the works of Christ is not a call to legalistic practice of the Scriptures. Rather, it is a call to obedience to the Holy Spirit as He teaches you how to apply the Scripture on a moment-by-moment basis.

So abide constantly, that you can hear the voice of God more clearly. Consider taking up the challenge to pray without ceasing. Don’t attempt this only to try it for a short period, but instead prepare yourself to abide continually in the Spirit. That you should pray continually is evident, for as it is written,

“Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving...” Colossians 4:2

And that we should worship continuously is also evident. For it is written,

“I will bless the LORD at all times; His praise shall continually be in my mouth.” Psalm 34:1

And also,

“...Stand up and bless the LORD your God Forever and ever! Blessed be Your glorious name, Which is exalted above all blessing and praise!” Nehemiah 9:5

God deserves our praises. Why should you give everything else in your life our continual attention while only giving God a few minutes each morning? If anything distracts you from God, then it's an idol. If your life is sold out to Jesus, then why would the activities of life distract you from Him? Those who are sold out for Christ live every moment with Christ and for Christ. But just because Jesus is with you doesn't mean your heart is with Him as it ought to be.

If you're allowing life and entertainment to occupy all your time, then enjoying life is an idol to you. While God did make life so that it may be enjoyed, He didn't make it so it could be enjoyed without Him.

Don't allow the pleasure of your own heart to rule over you but, rather, live for the Lord's purpose. Not everything He calls you to do will be fun, and not everything will be in line with what your heart wants or what you think is right. As it is written,

“For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways,” says the LORD. “For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts.” Isaiah 55:8–9

God knows better than we do. Remember that, if you're going to live for Jesus, you are called to carry your cross daily. If you aren't doing this, then you are not living a God-directed life. We all must be led by the Lord. As it is also written,

“For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.” Romans 8:14

Our lives will never please the Lord without Christ at the helm. If you let God direct your life, He'll bring you to places of peace. He'll also create a tightly knit bond between you and your spouse. Marriage is His invention, and if you surrender to His design and His leading, He'll bless it. But if you choose to forge your own path or listen to the advice of those who don't submit to God, it will lead down roads of regret.

Counselors who are not of Christ would tell you to conform your marriage to the American doctrine. In so doing, you may have a good marriage in the world's eyes, but those who counsel you in Christ will counsel you to conform to God's design.

Since God created marriage, wouldn't He know better than anyone else how it works? If you submit to His design, you'll have a marriage that both pleases Him and blesses you.

So learn to be led by the Lord in all you do. If your life isn't surrendered to live for God's purpose, how could your marriage be surrendered to His blueprint?

Take the time to grow in the word as well. Read your Bible and study it diligently. Take the time to read alone and to read together. Pray together also. Be equally serious about your alone time with God and your fellowship time with your spouse. Every night should be fellowship night. If your conversations reflect on the Lord and what He's doing in your life after you get home from work, then your entire night will be fellowship.

The more you fellowship with your spouse, the better your friendship will be with him or her. So take it to heart to draw near to the Lord daily; it will change your marriage.

The Prayer

Lord, I dedicate myself to walking in Your Spirit and abiding in You. I take it to heart to grow in Your word and Your virtues. Help me to practice them as I surrender to Your Spirit's guidance daily. I devote myself to daily fellowship with my spouse. Help us to keep our conversations pure and upon You.

Change My Heart, O God

God gives us certain people and circumstances in life to sharpen us through them. Your spouse is one of those people. In the first few years of marriage, your relationship will always suffer bumps and nicks. But when God heals these minor wounds, He makes you a stronger person in the process.

If you are still experiences any differences in your marriage, expect God to use them to change you. Even if they're not your fault, the Lord may still permit them to change your heart.

But if you're not willing to have your heart changed, then all they will do is create strife. So look for the lesson God may be teaching you in every season of life. If your spouse has wronged you, there are still areas in which you can grow as you wait for God to fix the situation –such as patience for example.

Don't look for ways your spouse can change, but focus on your own heart. Only speak the things they need to hear for necessary edification. If God is calling you to rebuke your spouse so that he or she may walk rightly, then do it. However, don't just look at how your spouse can grow from the situation; instead, examine your own heart.

As it is written,

“And even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.” Luke 3:9

And the Scriptures also tell us,

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

If you aren't bearing the fruits of the Spirit, then you have an account to give. So take the time to ask yourself how you've been growing in the fruits of the Spirit and how you can apply them toward your spouse.

Let's examine these fruits.

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

Have you been walking in the selfless, serving love of God? How have you served your spouse lately? Have you been rejoicing and worshipping in the Spirit? Have you been trying to keep peace in the home?

As we read,

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.” Matthew 5:9

If you keep peace in the house, God will bless you. Peace needs to be kept both spiritually and physically. If your spouse is trying to seek the Lord and abide quietly but the kids are getting in his or her hair, then take control of the situation. Lead the children out of the room and keep them quiet so that your spouse can be intimate with the Lord. If your spouse is frustrated with the kids to the point of yelling, encourage him or her to go rest in the Spirit while you take over watching the kids. Help reduce the stress so your spouse can retain peace of heart. Wouldn't love convict you to do this? If you don't, your spouse may yell at you next.

It's a true saying that you reap what you sow. If you allow seeds of stress to be sown in your spouse, you can expect to reap accordingly at some point. Even if you didn't plant the apple tree, you know that apples fall off the tree whenever the wind blows them. If you position yourself downwind, you'll experience the fruit in a way you never intended.

If you see the fruits of stress rising up in your spouse, then as much as it depends on you, try to help him or her. Keep the peace by keeping the home clean as well. I personally find it easier to pray in a room that's tidy. If there are things strewn about, my thoughts linger on what needs to be done. No one can pray with a distracted mind, so do what is necessary to keep the house peaceful both physically and spiritually. The home is meant to be a place of rest, not wrestling.

To continue with the fruits, ask yourself how you've been longsuffering with your spouse. Have you been patient with your spouse as he or she grows in the Lord? Have you been portraying the patience of Christ in arguments?

How have you been showing kindness to your spouse? Husbands ought to consider that a woman likes a small gift every day more than a big one every once in a long while. She would prefer a rose thoughtfully picked for her daily more than two dozen given monthly. A woman needs daily affection. So how have you been providing this lately?

Wives, meanwhile, ought to consider how you've been encouraging and building up your husband. Men love compliments, affection, and help. If you're a stay-at-home mom and he works, consider having the house clean for him when he gets home. Remember that a clean environment promotes a peaceful atmosphere and if you sow peace in him, you'll reap it from him. If you want to compliment him, don't merely say something nice yet trite. Instead, think for a while to identify something you really admire about him. Then tell him from your heart what you admire about him and why. If you feel as if you can't admire him, try to remember those reasons you did when you were first married. Whether you are a husband or a wife, reflect on the good, not the negative, that you see in your spouse. Does God reflect on the negative He sees in you? Remember that He calls you to forgive seventy times seven. So forgive, and overlook the weaknesses in your spouse even as God overlooks them in you. And Jesus warned us,

"But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment...(Matthew 5:22, NKJV)

Jesus has forgiven your spouse's shortcomings. To speak evil of him or her is to speak evil of the blood of Christ. Walk in love and let it guide your heart.

Always look for ways to serve and bless your spouse. Pray that God will open your eyes, and He'll show you what to do. A good place to start would be to ask your spouse from time to time during the day if he or she needs any help with anything. Have you been practicing this? Take it to heart to be a kind and serving person as Jesus is.

How have you been growing in moral goodness? How have you been practicing the virtues of Jesus? What about faithfulness? Are there any leeches in your marriage? Is there someone who appeals more to you emotionally or physically than your spouse does? It doesn't need to be lust to be an issue of faithfulness. If you'd rather spend time with other people than with your own spouse, then you have a leech. Your spouse should be your best friend, and if he or she is not, you need to rectify that immediately.

Have you been gentle? Are your arguments gentle? Try having a gentle argument once. It's simple! It's called a discussion, in which you work out your differences of opinion to align them together with Christ's.

How have you had self-control? Have you allowed the flesh to rule over your marriage? Are you fleshly with your spouse? Do you partake in idle entertainment or become angry easily? Do you hear the Holy Spirit speaking to

you constantly, or are there thoughts that are keeping you from hearing? If you are self-disciplined to walk continually in the Spirit, you'll bear the fruits daily as you ought. Thus, the fruits come full-cycle in your marriage through self-discipline and abidance in the Spirit.

Take the time to examine your heart. Grow constantly and let God change your heart.

The Prayer

Lord, I commit myself to daily growth. Help me to obtain Your heart and to grasp Your virtues. Help me to practice them. Be my strength in my weakness, that I can focus on your Holy Spirit continually as I should. I devote myself from this day forward to practicing each of the fruits of the Spirit toward my spouse.

Lord, Help Me to Tame My Tongue

With your words you can bless, and with them you can break a spirit. And if they're not founded in love, they'll always be harmful in one way or another.

You need to take to heart what you say to your spouse. Words can divide your marriage or unify it. If you let the love of God guide your mouth, you'll be justified. But if you don't speak in love, there is an account to give, for by our words we are judged. Even as Jesus said,

“But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.” Matthew 12:36–37

Now, Beloved, let's consider for a moment: What justifies a man and fulfills the law? Love, no doubt. Seeing, then, that we will be justified by love and judged according to our words, it would stand to reason that we must learn to speak our words continually with love.

This is easier said than done. Consider arguments, coarse jesting, and all those words you regret. Praise God for our Savior! But even though you have grace, you ought to grow in speaking words seasoned with salt, in love and with all purity. As it is written,

“A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart brings forth evil. For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.” Luke 6:45

“But those things which proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and they defile a man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies. These are the things which defile a man, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile a man.” Matthew 15:18–20

Don't let your words defile your marriage and corrupt its peace. Guard your heart from choice words and instead speak in love. The enemy tempts us, in the heat of a fight, to use words we'll regret. They may sound good at the time, but later you'll regret it. One day, you'll regret every sin. So take it to heart to resist the devil and press forward in the love of God.

Be careful not to engage in idle chatter, but rather turn your spouse back to God with everything you say. If what you say doesn't edify him or her, then why are you saying it? If it doesn't turn your spouse to Jesus, then what's the point? If it isn't spoken in love, then don't say it. So think before you speak and try to find words that build up rather than break down.

Leave nagging and contentiousness by the wayside. A friendly reminder once is fine, but nagging eats away at anyone's soul and only creates contention. And rather than saying something negative, try to augment your spouse with your words. Refrain from such statements such as these:

"That's not going to work."

"That's a bad idea."

"I think that's stupid."

"How much money is that going to cost?!"

"We can't afford that."

"That will never happen."

These only crush a spirit and stifle faith. But with God anything is possible, so why would money matter? If God gave your spouse an idea, why would it be a bad idea? Merely because it doesn't make sense to you?

If you have a better idea, then offer it without giving offense to the other person, and he or she will respect your opinion.

For example, "That's not going to work" should be changed to "That's a good idea. How are we going to make it work?"

"That's a bad idea" should be changed to "That's a good idea, but have you thought of this?" or "What does the Lord think of your idea?"

"I think that's stupid" should be changed to "What is God telling us to do?"

"How much is that going to cost?" should be changed to "Is God going to provide for this?"

"We can't afford that!" should be changed to "Is the Lord calling us to take on that expense?"

"That will never happen" should be changed to "Is that what God wants for us?"

Don't just shoot someone down. If you explain yourself with loving and kind words, you will change how the other person perceives you. If you don't properly communicate your love to your spouse, he or she won't feel loved and this will create issues in your marriage. But if you change your words, you will transform how your spouse perceives you. Make him or her feel loved even by critical words. Again I will say: Augment and do not tear down.

Changing the heart comes first. But as we change our words, our hearts in turn are further changed. By guarding your lips, you're guarding your future with your spouse and your future judgment before God. Take the time to consider how your words have been pointing your spouse back to the love of God. Consider how you've been healing with your words. If there is any way in which you haven't been doing these things, then change your words. It will bless your marriage.

The Prayer

Lord, help me to guard my mouth. Teach me how to love and heal with my words. I want everything I say and do to be a reflection of You. I commit my mouth to speaking Your holiness. Purify my words and convict me before I say anything that is not of You.

Jesus, I Give You Ownership of My Life

God has an ultimate plan for you—a place you should be taking up in the body of Christ. Do you know what that plan or place is? Daily He has small plans for you. Do you know what those are?

Do you know what God wants you doing daily? Do you know what He wants you doing immediately after your devotion time? Do you have plans to do things, or does God have plans to which you submit? How do you know God's will for your life? Do you know His immediate will?

If not, take the time to pray. Do not stop inquiring of the Lord until He's answered you.

Search your heart to see if anything isn't lining up with God's plan for your life. If you're chasing after your own desires or plans that are not God's, then you aren't chasing after the Lord.

If you aren't chasing Him, then division will manifest in your marriage. If Jesus is the center, however, then you and your spouse will become closer to each other the closer you get to that center.

Keep your heart in line with God's. The only way to do this truly is through being led by the Spirit, which happens when we listen to His voice and obey it. So the question is: Have you been hearing God's voice lately?

Sensitize yourself to His voice and obey Him immediately when you hear Him. Surrender your heart and your plans in life to pick up His. Never plan anything without praying and waiting for God's answer first. Some people pray but don't wait for God to answer. Instead they get off their knees and do what they intended to do without waiting for any of God's.

But as it is written,

“Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” Philippians 4:6–7

Lay everything before God in prayer. Make it a custom with your spouse to do this at all times. Let God guide your family, that you may not be ruled by self-willed decisions.

Agreeing to obey the Lord's plan together will create unity in Christ, which in turn will result in a deeper, more fulfilling relationship with both the Lord and your spouse.

The Prayer

Lord, I know You have a plan for my life. Give me revelation, that I may understand Your plan. Help me to stay in the center of Your will at all times. Help me to keep my heart on track with Yours. I know You have works and activities for me to accomplish daily. Help me to recognize them, that I can submit to You in this.

I relinquish my plans and my will to You today. I agree with my spouse that my house will chase after You and Your plan for us, Lord.

Lord, Help Me to Hear You More Clearly

In order to hear God's conviction, you need to be sensitive to His voice. Sometimes God will call you to serve your spouse, but if you aren't listening, you won't hear it. I have personally experienced this call innumerable times.

Many were the times I have sat down to read the Bible but God wouldn't speak to me through the pages. So I'd pray and ask Him why. Then, with a soft voice, He'd reply, "Because today I want you to apply the Bible." Then, upon getting up, I would find that my wife needed help around the house or with the children and it was stressing her out.

Love should compel us to bear one another's burdens. But let's face it: Sometimes our eyes aren't opened to others' needs because we're too caught up in the busyness of life. While we should always open our eyes to others' needs, sometimes we simply need God to show us how we can serve and love each other.

If you aren't sensitive to His voice, you'll never know what works God has in mind for you. Remember what the Scriptures say:

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

God created us for good works that He has prepared for us. We'll never know what they are if we don't take the time to grow in discerning and understanding His voice.

So the question is: Do you understand the Lord's voice with clarity? Or can it be hard for you to discern His will? How often do you hear the Lord speaking? I'm telling you right now, from experience, that God is always speaking. So if you're not always hearing Him, then other things in your life are taking your attention away from Him.

Hearing God more clearly is simple: Abide more and pay attention to His Spirit. Common distractions that will keep you from hearing Him include allowing the flesh to be idly entertained, ignoring His voice, disobedience, and anything that satisfies the desires of the flesh contrary to the Lord's desires.

When you focus on your own heart and your own wants rather than on God's, you are plugging your ears to His voice. Don't let the flesh grow over your

spiritual ears, lest you need God to perform surgery. If you're accustomed to fulfilling the impulses of the flesh, God will likely give you a trial to scrape away those desires that are contrary to Him.

If you set your heart toward growing in discernment, however, God will help you. Pray for the wisdom to know His voice, and the Lord will grant it. However, knowing God's voice and obeying are two separate things. Sometimes the Lord will call you to do things that are contrary to your own heart, but you must carry your cross and obey anyway. If you don't, you will only find it harder to hear His voice next time. Why?

Consider whether you like to talk to someone who doesn't care about what you have to say. Neither does God speak to those who won't listen. While He may speak on occasion, most of His words are reserved for the obedient.

Now the real question is "How can we obey if we don't understand?" God never speaks in a confusing manner. He is not the author of chaos and confusion; Satan is. So any issues with discernment are not due to the Lord speaking unclearly. Rather, any confusion is due to your unclear discernment.

In order to grow in this respect, first you must recognize that the fault lies with you. Then, through humility, you begin applying the truths and practicing the habits that increase your understanding of His voice.

When you think you have heard the Lord but then circumstances don't turn out the way you thought they would, have the humility to admit it. Mark that voice in your mind as "not God" and then, the next time you hear it, don't listen. But when the voice turns out to be the Lord, mark it in your mind as being God; then obey every time you hear it.

The best way to grow in understanding His voice is through the word of God. This is a method that I constantly teach, and you will often hear it from me or read it in my other titles. I could never emphasize enough that the best way to grow in understanding God's voice is through listening to His voice while you study your Bible. Everything God says will always be in agreement with Scripture. So the more you grow in the word, the more you will understand His voice.

Every time God speaks to you, write His words down in your Bible. I personally use the NKJV *Take Note* Bible, which is a wide-margin Bible. Wide margins give you the extra room you'll need when writing the words the Lord shares with you. Then, when you read your Bible later, you'll have the notes for reference.

They will serve as a reminder regarding the truths the Lord has taught you through His word.

When He speaks, write only His words and not your own thoughts. This is not the time for personal notes. If you commit your study time to writing only God's words and not your own, you will better discern between your own heart and His voice.

God is always teaching you, whether through the word or through the circumstances of life. When you read, the Spirit will compare each scripture with others or with circumstances you are experiencing in your life. That He teaches us is evident, for we read,

“These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual.” 1 Corinthians 2:13

And also,

“But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you.” John 14:26

And as Jesus said,

“It is written in the prophets, ‘And they shall all be taught by God.’ Therefore everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to Me.” John 6:45

Knowing this, take the time to be taught by God as you study your Bible. The Holy Spirit will teach you the true doctrine and build you in His wisdom. Then, as you listen to Him and discern between your own heart and His voice, you'll come to know His voice perfectly. From there, all you have to do is abide and pay attention to the Holy Spirit's presence. As you do, you'll notice His voice constantly whispering to you.

He'll show you how to apply the love of God toward your spouse in practical ways, and He will convict you when you aren't walking uprightly. He'll teach you how and when to discipline your children—and everything else you need to know about every circumstance in life.

The Prayer

Lord, I know I need You to teach me. So please help me to hear Your voice more clearly. Open my ears to hear and my mind to understand.

I dedicate my life to following and obeying Your Holy Spirit. Show me how I can apply Your love to my spouse.

I Will Put Marriage Before Ministry

By ‘ministry’ I do not merely mean to say “being a pastor.” Rather, I am discussing the moments in which you serve anyone other than your spouse.

In the early church, a man was called to prove himself in the home before he could even be considered an elder. As it is written, a bishop must be “one who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence (for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?)....” 1 Timothy 3:4–5

If a man cannot rule his house, then he cannot take care of the church of God. How much more does this apply in every other facet of ministry?

Now, you don’t have to be a minister to have a ministry. If you work a job and God is calling you to witness to certain individuals there, you have a ministry. If the Lord has called you to feed the homeless or rake for your elderly neighbor, then you have a ministry. While you may not be a minister, you have a type of ministry when you’re ministering Jesus to another person.

Marriage is also a ministry. If anyone is not found faithful in marriage, he or she will be judged accordingly. Now, there is more than one type of unfaithfulness. There is physical unfaithfulness, in which you give your body to someone other than your spouse in sexual impurity. There is also emotional unfaithfulness, in which you’re more attached to someone other than your spouse. Then there is the impurity of the leech. This can manifest as pornography or as giving a friend or hobby more attention or emotion than you do your spouse.

There is also unfaithfulness in regard to taking up one’s role properly. God gave a man his place in the marriage and a woman her place in the marriage. If anyone refuses his or her position in favor of satisfying his or her own heart, then that person rejects both the Lord and His design. No one can claim to honor and walk with the Lord while refusing the Lord at the same time.

Lastly, there is ministerial unfaithfulness. This is when certain people may claim that their God-given objectives have supreme priority above their marriage. But God would not call you to do anything that would destroy the institution of marriage. If a person’s supposed ministry involves doing so, then he or she needs to take a step back and ask whether God is truly calling him or her to that service.

You also need to recognize your spouse's God-given work, duty, or task and willfully surrender him or her back to the Lord. Similarly to how Hannah gave Samuel back to the Lord, a person must be willing to allow his or her spouse to serve the Lord. But feeding the homeless isn't better than fixing one's own marriage. Raking leaves for a friend isn't more important than serving your spouse.

If you serve others around you but don't serve your own spouse, then you're acting hypocritically. First we must strengthen the foundation and the pillars; then we can worry about building the rest of the house. If Christ is the foundation of marriage, then the husband and wife are the support beams or pillars that hold each other up. As it is written,

“Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labor. For if they fall, one will lift up his companion. But woe to him who is alone when he falls, for he has no one to help him up. Again, if two lie down together, they will keep warm; but how can one be warm alone? Though one may be overpowered by another, two can withstand him. And a threefold cord is not quickly broken.” Ecclesiastes 4:9–12

If you are caught up with serving others except your own spouse, you are cursing him or her. God gave you your spouse's hands so you may hold, love, serve, and cherish that person. But if you abandon your spouse's need for you, then the statement “*But woe to him who is alone when he falls, for he has no one to help him up*” takes effect. The first person who should be there for your husband or wife is you.

For example, your spouse may be suffering emotionally in ways you aren't. If you aren't there to hold him or her through it all, then how are you practicing love at all? If your spouse is stressed out by his or her job, then you need to be the one to help him or her relax and feel loved at home. If you don't serve your spouse in this, then you're doing a disservice to your own marriage and forsaking your spouse when he or she needs you. Let love compel you to serve your spouse and to be there for him or her when needed.

It is important for a husband to be in tune with his wife's state of heart. If she is a homemaker, for example, she may become bored or lonely quickly. If you're not really one for talking, this could tear her apart in the long run. She has no one around her with whom to enjoy wholesome, intelligent adult conversation. The kids consume her time, and she never gets a day off as you do. On her Sabbath day, she still does everything she would on any other day. Taking care of

children can be stressful, difficult work. If you aren't connecting with her emotionally, and taking the time every day to kindle a friendship through communication and fellowship, then you're doing a disservice to your marriage and forsaking your spouse when she needs you most. A woman has deep emotions but a small tank. She requires refills multiple times a day, and if you aren't filling her, it's only a matter of time before she breaks down.

Look at the needs of your spouse before you look to serve anyone else. For home-keeper wives, it isn't Christian to clean up someone else's home while continually leaving your own home a mess for your husband. Begin with the ministry God has given you. Then, after you have faithfully mastered it, branch out to serve others as God leads you.

Serving others outside the marriage isn't always about serving the Lord. If you won't take care of your spouse, then you aren't serving God at all. Providing for and taking care of your own household should come first. Then, if time, space, and money are left, use that to serve others. But that we should take care of our family is evident, for we read,

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

Now, this scripture is specifically talking about children and grandchildren taking care of their widowed mothers and grandmothers. But if the child is worse than an unbeliever for forsaking his or her mother when she needs help most, how much more do you sin if you don't take care of your spouse? Your spouse has many needs that must be provided for—not just physical needs but emotional and spiritual needs as well.

Let each of us do what is necessary, that we may abide in the Spirit together. If your spouse is stressed or struggling to abide, then have him or her sit down while you take over for a while. Allow your spouse to get a moment of peace with God so he or she can be refreshed in the Spirit. Care for your spouse's needs and provide for him or her in whatever way is necessary.

Ultimately, if your marriage needs attention, turn around and fix it before you continue to serve others. Even if it's a momentary falling out through an argument, drop everything and go to be unified with your spouse. As it is written,

“Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your

brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.”
Matthew 5:23–24

This gift was once the sacrifice the Jews gave for the forgiveness of sins. Jesus is saying, “If you want to be forgiven, then go through the ropes of repentance and be reconciled to those whom you’ve offended.”

If you are called to do this with a brother, how much more should you do it with your spouse? Take this to heart, putting your marriage first. Constantly strengthen the foundation, and then you’ll have an augmented ability to serve the Lord. How so? Because your spouse can help you to accomplish the tasks you can’t while you’re busily serving the Lord. He or she can help you serve the Lord by serving you where and when you need help, which will result in an amplified capacity to serve Him.

The Prayer

Lord, I know that You call me to serve my spouse before anyone else. Help me to be faithful with the tasks You've given me to do at home. Help me to serve those nearest to me first, before I stretch out to help others. I know I have an account to give for my marriage, so I pray that You will help me to stay accountable.

God, I devote myself to strengthening the foundation before I move on to build other aspects of my family and my life.

Help Me to Forgive

Choice words ruin any relationship. But forgiveness holds the power to heal—to heal friendship, mend the broken heart, and find peace.

Choice actions destroy more than words do because actions speak louder than words. Yet forgiveness has the power to heal, and the first person forgiveness heals is the forgiver.

Choice forgiveness has already changed your life. Consider that God has chosen to forgive you even though you sin against Him. Let His love inspire you to forgive your spouse as well—because if you can't forgive those who are closest to you, whom can you forgive?

Unforgiveness creates bitterness, but complete forgiveness sets your heart free. When you harbor unforgiveness, it acts like a massive weight on your chest, burdening your heart from all the joy God has intended for you.

Being unable to forgive is also dangerous. As it is written,

“You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.’ But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment...” Matthew 5:21–22

Notice that being angry without a cause results in the same judgment as murder!

“Well, I have a cause. My spouse sinned against me!” one may contend. However, if your spouse has repented, then the blood of Jesus covers him or her. If the blood of the Lord has cleansed your spouse, then God doesn't see any fault in him or her any longer. If God doesn't see a fault and God is never wrong, why should we blaspheme the blood of Jesus by holding our spouse's sins against him or her? If God has forgiven him or her, then we have no cause to be angry. If we have no cause, then as Jesus said, we are under the same judgment as a murderer. Why? Because being angry without reason is malice, and showing malice is being hateful. As it is written,

“Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.” 1 John 3:15

Knowing this, be compelled by love to forgive, even as Jesus has forgiven you. Don't hold a record of wrongs but, rather, release the debt to God. In the end, the first person to be healed will be you as you learn to allow the healing of God into

your heart to the point of forgiveness. But if you don't forgive, then you won't be forgiven, either. Even as Jesus said,

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

And also,

"Then his master, after he had called him, said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you?' And his master was angry, and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him. 'So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses.'" Matthew 18:32–35

God has forgiven you much, so go and do likewise. As Jesus also said,

"Therefore I say to you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much. But to whom little is forgiven, the same loves little." Luke 7:47

Let love compel you to be the image of Jesus in everything you do. If you don't love those who are closest to you, how can you love anyone? Love and forgiveness go hand in hand. Let love satisfy your heart through the power of forgiveness.

Examine your own heart. If there is any way in which you haven't forgiven your spouse, then forgive. Be careful also to forgive future insults quickly.

During arguments is a prime example of when unforgiveness sets in. When harsh words are exchanged, don't take them to heart. If you do, then you'll be tempted to say things you'll wish you never had. But if you forgive your spouse and keep your composure, you'll guard your lips to love him or her.

Unforgiveness is a wedge that drives deeply into a marriage. The more grievances you hold against your spouse, the closer to divorce you'll be. But if you repay your spouse with love for his or her offenses, then the healing of Jesus will overwhelm the darkest moments of your marriage.

The Prayer

Teach me to forgive as you forgive, Lord. Even during disagreements, I pray, help me to portray Your heart. I commit myself to being a forgiving person by my actions, even if the other person hasn't shown repentance as of yet.

I Will Put My Spouse Before My Children

The marriage is the foundation of the family, with Jesus as the chief cornerstone. If we give more attention to the building while allowing the foundation to crumble, then it is only a matter of time before the whole structure will collapse. It could take months, years, or decades, but without a doubt, the whole family will crumble if the proper attention isn't given to both the foundation and the cornerstone.

Those who have weak or struggling marriages will also have emotionally troubled children. The parents are a child's world. Watching their parents experience continual disunity shatters their world. God made marriage to be a structure that stands the test of time. Children don't just need two parents who are there for them; they need two parents who will get along and love each other. They need to see the power of God's love in full display as they watch their mother and father interact.

Fighting can result in undue stress on a child. Then the parents who are stressed may accidentally, and regrettably, take it out on their children. Even if a child knows the parent is sorry, just watching the entire scenario unfold is unnerving. This never goes well for the parent-child relationship, especially in the case of teenagers. If you and your spouse don't have any reason to respect each other, then your teenager may not feel any different.

God has called us to unity, love, and likemindedness with our spouse. In order to accomplish this, you must spend much time building, and perhaps mending, your marital relationship. This requires your relationship with your spouse to take greater priority than does your relationship with your children.

Unfortunately, some parents put the interests of their children first. Those who do so risk losing their spouse or sharing in a damaged marriage in time to come. I can never emphasize enough that if you allow the foundation to go unmaintained, your marriage will crumble over time as it is exposed to the eroding elements of life.

Sometimes this issue arises in the Christian marriage when the ministry of the children receives more attention than the ministry of the marriage does. Children are, in fact, a ministry, for you are commanded to disciple them in Christ. As it is written,

“Therefore you shall lay up these words of mine in your heart and in your soul, and bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall teach them to your children, speaking of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. And you shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates, that your days and the days of your children may be multiplied in the land of which the LORD swore to your fathers to give them, like the days of the heavens above the earth.” Deuteronomy 11:18–21

A husband and wife must be unified in the way they raise their children. If they aren't, they may put the children first and then fight about how the children are raised. This will cause the children to pick favorites between the parents. A child may love one parent and despise the other. Thus, the whole house will be divided.

So how can we be unified? Through embracing the mind of Christ. If you are attentive to the voice of God, the Lord will tell you when to spank and when to refrain. He will show you everything you need to do. But if you aren't accustomed to having your ears attuned to the Lord, you won't hear Him and, thus, won't properly discipline your child. So as we mentioned before, it is a must for the believer to grow in hearing and understanding the voice of the Spirit.

Diligent study of the Scripture will augment your efforts in this regard. As husband and wife, study together how the Lord calls you to raise your children. Then, with unity of heart and mind, agree to apply the Lord's discipline. Remember that these are not your children; they are God's. From God they came, and to God they shall return. Be like Hannah, who willfully offered her child Samuel to serve the Lord. Daily offer your children to God, not only in prayers but also by pointing them to God in everything you instruct them to do.

God has shown me that a child must respect your words and learn to listen to you the first time you speak. If you give them chances to misbehave, they will take chances; but if you don't, then they will learn to respect you. Everywhere my family goes, people are raving to me about how wonderful and well behaved my children are. But I know in my heart this isn't because they're good kids. Rather, it's because they are properly disciplined.

Good children are not born. They are made through proper, loving discipline. God doesn't give you good or bad children; rather, He gives you the authority to lead them to good and proper conclusions through appropriate positive and

negative reinforcement. For as it is written,

“Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me.”
Psalm 51:5

Everyone is born in sin. While a child may be sanctified by the believing parents, sin is impossible to avoid. With that said, a child is naturally bad and needs proper discipline to lead him or her to Christ. Notice that I say *proper* discipline.

We should not punish, or discipline in wrath. Every moment a child is disciplined is a moment of training. As it is written,

“Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.” Proverbs 22:6

Train your children to obey. Don’t punish them and hope they’ll figure it out. How could they? They’re just children! So lovingly guide them to the right conclusions by telling them why they are being disciplined. Explain that their conduct is sin (and if it’s not, then explain why are they being disciplined). After this, explain the meaning of repentance and do not stop the discipline until your children repent from the heart.

If you train your children to love the Lord and teach them that it’s right to do so, then they will love Him. And if they love Him, repentance will be natural. Those who do not have saved children must teach them the importance of repentance, that the wages of sin are discipline, and that they need to listen to their mommy’s and daddy’s words. Why? Because if they don’t take the words you say seriously, then neither will they take the gospel seriously when you preach it to them. But if they respect your words, then they will respect the word of God when it comes from your mouth.

After your children have received the Holy Spirit, all you have to do is teach them to submit to His conviction and listen to it continually. When you turn the hearts of your children to the Spirit, the Lord will take control of the parenting, from inside your children. The end result will be respectful, godly, loving children who continue to walk in the Lord because they have been trained to do so.

Taking them to church and hoping they’ll figure out the right things from the teachings they receive there is not enough. God has commanded you to take charge of your children’s future and to train them in the Lord. This is a

commandment from God, and if you love Him and your children, you'll take their eternal security seriously and train them up in the Lord.

There are no ifs, ands, or buts about this. This must be done, or there will be an account to give. God will require your children from your hand, and you'll have to explain to Him why you chose to raise them the way you have.

How will God respond to your parenting? Trying our best doesn't cut it. God desires to parent through you. So who's in charge of your child's future—you or God, who is training them through you?

I don't know about you, but I want the Lord to say to me, "Well done, My good and faithful servant!"

If your spouse isn't saved, God still commands you to raise your child in Christ. So if your unsaved spouse doesn't agree, you need to take to heart that your child could be separated from you for eternity because of your decision to disobey the Lord and not train the child to receive Jesus as Savior.

Many will say that it is ultimately the child's decision whether or not he or she will choose Christ. While this may be true, a child who is trained to follow his or her own heart and despise the salvation of God is a hundred times less likely to choose Christ than is a child who is trained to love God and shown how to follow Him.

Ultimately, you must be unified with your spouse in the way you raise your children. Your kids are your ministry. However, you cannot put the ministry of children above the ministry of marriage. Don't let the process of raising your children get in the way of your relationship with your husband or wife. No aspect of parenting should ever get in the way of a marriage.

Rather, parenting should support marriage as you learn to serve your spouse's need to abide in the Spirit first. If your kids are driving your spouse crazy, then take the helm. Let your spouse have some freedom to breathe in the Spirit, and serve your spouse by taking care of the children for him or her. This is something that I most often see necessary for a stay-at-home mother. She never gets a break or a true Sabbath. So the daddy should be willing to serve her by stepping into her shoes for a couple hours or a whole day each week as necessary. Take the kids and let her have Jesus.

If married couples would do this for each other, then it would be easier for each parent to act like Jesus toward their children. Stress can keep us from being the

example we ought to be. Therefore, parent in your spouse's place sometimes—for the whole family's sake.

The Prayer

Lord, I will commit myself to train my children up in Your ways, that they may find You as Savior. I will lead them in Your love, in unity with my spouse. Today I commit to studying Your word with my spouse in order to learn how to raise my children properly. I commit to doing this daily until I have a full understanding of Your word and Your voice.

I surrender to Your Holy Spirit, that as He convicts me, You Father can parent my children through me. As the Father, You were always meant to be their true parent. So I surrender them to you now, that You can receive back what has always been Yours.

Bless my marriage as I grow in unity with my spouse.

Help Me to Be a Better Listener

Communication is essential for success in any marriage. Without the ability to communicate one's heart effectively, division and brokenness will ensue.

The woman may feel lonely, unloved, and desiring to feel treasured but finding nothing. Even though she's a tender and beautiful person, she will not receive what she needs to fill her emotional tank.

For his part, a man may feel disrespected, unwanted, unloved, and lonely. Even though God commands that a husband and wife should respect one another, he'll feel as though he doesn't receive any.

Both of these situations occur through a constant breakdown in communication. Every person should be expressing his or her heart freely in a manner that blesses his or her spouse. But because some don't know how to express themselves in a way that blesses their husband or wife, they find themselves broken—and breaking others. This issue can be resolved by listening to and studying your spouse.

Listen to your spouse's heart and pay attention to how he or she receives your words and actions. If it seems as if your spouse isn't receiving your words or actions well, then learn how to rephrase things for his or her sake. If you're intending to speak love but your spouse is not hearing love, then you aren't communicating love. If you feel you are loving your spouse but he or she doesn't feel loved by your conduct, then you're not acting like Christ. It's not about how you love the individual but about how he or she receives and perceives your love.

Jesus loves us in a way that effectively meets our hearts with what we need. You, likewise, should be willing to change the way you approach your spouse so that he or she can feel loved by you. Sometimes when you love someone, you may tend to focus on yourself and how you love the other person rather than on how he or she feels loved by you. In communicating love, however, there are two ends to the communication: the giver and the receiver. People sometimes tend to focus on the fact that they give love and forget to analyze how others receive that love. In this, without realizing it, you can unintentionally make your love for spouse about yourself.

You should always examine your spouse to make sure his or her emotional tank

is filled. A woman needs to feel cherished, treasured, wanted, and embraced. A man's emotional tank is slightly different, however. He needs to be given confidence boosts by kind words. These fill his emotional tank more than touchy-feely words do. Similarly to a woman, he needs to feel wanted and appreciated. If he doesn't feel appreciated for what he does, and if he doesn't feel as if he's good at what he does, he feels inadequate.

So take the time to hear out your spouse. By so doing, you'll know when his or her emotional tank needs filling. Sometimes your spouse just wants to share his or her heart or to present his or her side of the conversation. If you constantly cut your spouse off, he or she will feel unloved or unappreciated. It will seem to your spouse that his or her words don't matter to you.

God gave you two ears and one mouth, which serves as a reminder that you should be a better listener than you are a talker. Sometimes you really just want to share your own heart. But true love suggests that you would be willing to absorb someone else's words while waiting patiently for your turn to speak.

Take the time to practice listening. If your spouse wants to share something with you, try waiting for your turn to talk. But in the meantime, don't struggle to hold onto your thought so hard that you don't process what your spouse is saying. Listening is more than hearing: Hearing is the ability to perceive sound while listening is caring about, and absorbing, the words being spoken.

Your spouse wants to be understood, so take to heart what he or she says to you, no matter how insignificant, and it will mean the world to them. Don't be quick to give advice or add to the conversation, especially if your spouse is pouring his or her heart out. Sometimes a person just wants to be heard.

The Prayer

God, I dedicate myself to becoming a better listener. How can I learn someone else's heart unless I take the time to hear it? I choose to let love govern my heart as I grow in compassion toward my spouse. Help me accept the things my spouse says even as (s)he shares opinions that may be contrary to mine.

Open my eyes to see when my spouse's emotional tank needs filling. I know if I talk all the time, I won't hear it. I also know that everyone draws closer to a listener. So help me to listen more than I talk, that my spouse may be nearer to me.

I want my spouse to know that I care about his (her) heart, so help me to treasure it.

I Will Dedicate Myself to Pray Continually for My Spouse

God commands you to be in constant prayer. So, wives, while you're practicing continual prayer throughout the day, take the time to pray continually for your husband. He likewise should pray for you. Satan throws a lot of arrows at the marriage. The husband has been given headship by God. For that reason, he'll be targeted. Satan will attack him at work, at home, through the children, and by everything around him so that, rather than abiding in order to lead you in the Spirit, he'll be meditating on his own heart. But you can be an encouragement to him to continue in the Spirit. All you have to do is abide constantly yourself; then, from that foundation, encourage him to do likewise.

But if you're praying for your husband, God will answer, and this will make a tremendous difference in his life. Even before I married my wife, God was changing my life through her prayers.

I once worked a factory job making pizzas for Jack's Pizza, DiGiorno, and Tombstone, and often the enemy attacked me there just to get me down. Machines would break down, certain coworkers would be harsh to me, and others disgusted me with their crudeness. On many occasions, Satan met me at my workplace but then, suddenly, the situation would stop and I'd feel the presence of God. Later I would talk to my wife, Megan, who was my fiancée at the time, and she'd say, "I prayed for you at this and that time. Did God do anything for you?" And it was always—without fail—the exact time she was praying when everything fixed itself and God met with me at my workstation.

I remember a particular time when I had to place the pizzas into shrink-wrap rolls to be prepared by machines and I had to work with a contentious old lady named Kathy to do so. One day, when one of the machines broke down—which was the operator's fault, not mine or Kathy's—she decided to be angry with me for it. Kathy proceeded to pin me against a wall using an entire metal rack of pizzas, which measured ten feet wide by seven feet high. Then, after I managed to roll the rack off of me, my team leader yelled at me because she thought I was playing around. So I began sweeping the area as I was supposed to, but Kathy threw the racks around again. She made a mess of things and almost got me written up. But then, suddenly, I felt the presence of God; and right when I did, the top supervisor walked by and caught Kathy trying to pin me with another pizza rack. I was pulled into the office and was able to explain what had

happened. After they interviewed a couple other people, they decided to write Kathy up, and she left me alone for the rest of my career with that company.

When I went home, I found out that my wife had prayed for me moments before the supervisor felt compelled to leave her office. It changed my life. A few short minutes of prayer was all it took to change my life. Never again did I have to deal with that contentious woman's attitude, and I felt the Lord with me constantly at my job after that. The funny thing is that the supervisor had no idea why she felt compelled to walk by. She had forgotten what she was doing, but something had urged her to get up at that moment, which I knew was the Lord's doing. The more embarrassing part happened later, when the supervisor informed me of Kathy's age: I now have to go through life knowing that I was beat up by an eighty-year-old woman.

So pray often for, and with, your husband. At every opportunity God grants you, you should pray for him. Read the Scriptures with him and let him teach you from the Bible as God leads him. Constantly fellowship with him. Every time you read something encouraging or learn something new, share it with him. Even if he already knows the concept you just learned, share it with him anyway. Your passion for God will cause him to desire the Lord as well. If he feels like being fleshly yet sees you being spiritual, he'll be convicted and seek the Lord. By this you can be an encouragement to him to walk in the Spirit.

The Prayer

God, I know my spouse needs prayer. So please help me to keep a disciplined heart in praying for him (her). Help me never to forget nor falter, so that my spouse can be encouraged by Your working hand. Hear my prayers for my spouse and help him (her) to walk strongly in You.

God, I Commit My Actions to Your Love

Do everything out of love. As it is written,

“He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.” 1 John 4:8

And as the scripture continues,

“If someone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also.” 1 John 4:20–21

Although you may love your spouse, he or she may not always receive your love if your actions are speaking otherwise. Love is not about how you express it but how the other person receives it. If your spouse doesn’t receive your actions as loving, then how are you being loving at all? Your spouse should never be repulsed or uncomfortable with who you are or what you do.

I once knew a man who always brought the worst out of his wife through disrespect. In the end she never came to church because she feared the judgment others laid upon her due to his gossip. Her marriage was a train wreck, and he was the engineer.

You have the power to bless your spouse’s life and the power to destroy it. Blessing someone else doesn’t mean blessing yourself; sometimes love requires us to carry our cross. But what would love compel you to do? What do you want your spouse to do for you? Remember that you reap what you sow. While you’ll never reap as quickly as you sow, you can be certain that the day you begin to reap, you will find your heart satisfied in every longing you’ve ever had.

If you want to be loved, then first you need to love. If you want to be cherished, treasured, and treated with respect and gentleness, then act likewise toward your spouse even if he or she isn’t doing the same for you. Change begins with you. God will only change the person who’s willing to be changed. If your spouse isn’t willing to grow, then you grow. Don’t let your marriage dictate your relationship with God. Love Him no matter what someone else is doing.

Never let your spouse’s actions determine how you will treat him or her. Walk in love no matter what. If God’s actions were dependent upon how we have treated Him, neither you nor I could be saved. But love compelled Him to die for us

while we were yet His enemies. Have the same mind as Christ had for you and carry your cross to love your spouse whether your spouse deserves it or not. For there was a time in your life when you didn't deserve God's love or forgiveness yet He gave them to you happily.

And He had no other way to give His love to you except through the conduit of self-sacrifice and literal death. Jesus died for you; now die to self for your spouse. Learn to die daily to your own desires and needs in order to fill those of your spouse. Love him or her and expect nothing in return. Then, in time to come, God's conviction will be too much for the other person to bear.

I once knew of a South African woman who dedicated her life to walking in God's love. Her husband hated God, and he despised his wife for her religion. Daily he beat her for her faith, and Sundays were worst of all.

"I thought I told you NEVER to go to that stupid [expletive] Church again!" he'd scream at her.

"I'm sorry ... but Jesus has my heart, and I won't let go of Him." she'd reply softly. But her reply was met by a swift punch to face.

She spent over 20 years of her marriage being beaten black and blue. Everyone urged her to divorce him, but she refused—not out of fear, but out of faith. "I'm persuaded that love will save his soul," she replied, "and if Jesus was beaten to save me, then I will do the same to save him, because both God and love are telling me to do this right now."

One day the man's life fell apart. Then the last person he ever expected to be there for him was by his side, loving him. Her love shattered him, and because of her unrelenting love, he gave his life to Christ. From that day forward, she was never hit again.

He learned to respect her and give her the dignity she always deserved—doubly so because of all the years of disrespect for which he needed to make up. In the end, all of her daughters gave their lives to Christ after seeing the difference Jesus had made in their father's life. Each of the daughters had tremendous respect for their mother—for her courage, resilience, and persistence to love.

Love binds a family together. It can take many years to see the love and grace of God bring your family together, as it did for this woman. But persist in faith because Jesus has the power to mend any broken family.

Now, I'm not telling you to stay in an abusive relationship. This woman was different. She felt a certain pull on her heart from God, and because she listened, her whole family was blessed forever. She demonstrated the power of God to forgive the unforgiveable, to love the unlovable, and to cherish the abominable. This is the very love that Jesus uses to save and convict souls to repentance daily. So do whatever God convicts you to do, and in His perfect timing, circumstances will all work together for good.

But don't let your actions be determined by how your spouse treats you. Be meek like Christ and love like no tomorrow.

The Prayer

Jesus, make me a living, breathing example of your love toward my spouse. Create in me a clean and upright heart through Your Holy Spirit, that I can walk in kindness as You command me. If You command me to do good to my enemies, how much more should I love and serve my spouse? I'm aware of the need for this. And I'm aware that every change in life begins with me.

Show me how to be the image of Your love so that, in everything I do, I can bless Your child. I know my spouse is Your baby and you take it personally how people treat him (her). So let me be found respecting and loving my spouse as You command me to do.

From this day forward, I devote myself to being a loving and living sacrifice. That no matter what my spouse does, I'll still cherish and treasure them.

Give Me a Servant's Heart

Serve your spouse. Those are three little words that will make a massive difference in your marriage. I can never express enough that you must maintain a servant's heart if you want a fulfilling marriage.

Learn your spouse's daily needs and take the time to address them. Serve your spouse physically and emotionally. We all have emotional tanks that need filling, so take the time to be aware of your spouse's state of heart and bring him or her some healing. If your spouse can't share his or her heart with you, then with whom?

If your spouse has any physical distresses, lift the load and carry the burden with him or her. As it is written,

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

Serve your spouse with a diligent heart. A few men may argue, “Well, actually, I'm supposed to lead.” But remember that Christ led yet He served the disciples. So serve your wife and wash her in the water of the word. Be the example of God's love to her and refresh her constantly in it. Women, serve your husband with a diligent heart. For this reason the woman was created, that she may be a companion to the man and help him.

Serving your spouse shouldn't be a once-in-a-while activity. Rather, it should be an ongoing, day-after-day work of love. Try to find multiple ways in which you can express God's love in action through serving, even if it is something as simple as a shoulder or foot rub after your spouse has a hard day at work. Men, if your wife doesn't work outside the home, know that she works very hard taking care of the children. She also never gets a day off. Therefore, try serving her with a true Sabbath. Help her with the dishes and household chores for one day. Feed the children and take over everything for her so she can have a day to rest in the Lord. She needs it just as much as you do.

Now some of you may be thinking, “I work hard. Very hard! How can I possibly help her with that? I need all the rest I can get!” If you can afford it, then, consider paying a friend or a maid to help.

Reading this, I know a few of you may have rolled off your chair just now. “A maid? Where am I going to get the money for that?” you may be asking.

But did you know that some maids are willing to come to your house once a week for a couple of hours and work for only \$10 to \$15 an hour? What if you set aside \$20 to \$30 a week for your wife to have a Sabbath? Don't you think she deserves it? Isn't God more important than that little bit of money? All you need to do is have someone come late in the day and stay for two or maybe three hours, and the whole house will be clean. Then, the next day, you can eat from paper plates with plastic-ware. The day before her Sabbath, you can make a double-sized breakfast and lunch and then save half for leftovers on the Sabbath. For supper, you can order a pizza. All of the dinnerware gets thrown away, and all you have to do for her is spot-clean a few things.

No matter who you are or where you're at in you walk, you should constantly look for ways to serve. If this is always on your mind, you'll find that your spouse has many more needs than you may ever have realized. For those of you who are stay-at-home moms, consider how hard your man works. Have a meal prepared for him and help him out of his coat when he gets home. Let him expect you at the door; let love be the first thing that greets him when he gets home. Help him recline, and serve him with a drink. Encourage him to pray and to release any issues of his heart to the Lord. Take the time to have a listening ear. If he had a stressful day, he needs your feminine touch. God made you sensitive, and he needs that sensitivity from you after a bad day. So serve him with a listening ear. Comfort him and remind him that he's at home with the people who love him most.

It should be a rule of the home that anyone who works must leave negative emotions on the other side of the door when he or she steps into the house. If you remember to do this, and then release yourself to God and your spouse, you won't carry the emotions in. If aggression enters the house due to a bad day at work, it will also create a bad day at home with your spouse. So serve your marriage in leaving the pain outside and picking up the love, peace, and healing inside.

Keep a mind to serve your spouse in everything God points out to you. But if you're not staying aware of your spouse's needs, you won't be able to serve him or her. So put a sign on your wall if you need to do so. I myself do this! Even my wife and I forget to serve each other sometimes due to her homeschooling and taking care of the children and my constant work in ministry. The busyness of life can keep us from remembering to apply this vital virtue continually. But a decorative plaque, picture, poster, or sign that simply says, "Remember to serve your spouse today," if left in a conspicuous place, will make it impossible to

forget.

Take it to heart to serve your spouse even if he or she doesn't serve you back. Consider all the times God has provided for you in your life. He never waits for your praise; rather, He shows you compassion regardless. He even sends rain on the fields of those who hate Him. If He will show love to His enemy, how much more should you serve your spouse even if he or she doesn't notice or serve you back? Wouldn't this be having the heart of Jesus? Your actions will convict your spouse to do the same for you before long—and if not, then say something loving and convicting that may motivate your spouse to serve you as hard as you have served him or her.

Persevering in this will change your marriage forever.

The Prayer

Lord, help me to be a better servant. Give me a servant's heart and help me to be the example of You in all my conduct. I want to show my spouse Your love through better serving him (her). Open my eyes to my spouse's needs, that I may accomplish this. Show me what You want me to do for my spouse so that I can love him (her) as You would, Jesus.

Jesus, Help Me to Cultivate a Friendship with My Spouse

Over time, some marriages go from a friendship to an idea of serving the institution of the marriage. Marriage may gradually become less of a kindled bond and more of an ideal or concept. Rather than build a friendship, you may tend to do things for the marriage. “This is best for the marriage” becomes a common phrase in an institutionalized marriage. At that point, you are just trying to keep the status quo for the marriage as such rather than building and cultivating a worthwhile relationship with someone who should be your best friend.

But there are many ways to rekindle those bonds. In marriage, no gift is greater than the gift of time. Plan some quality time with your spouse, without the kids. Don’t just do this once or twice in a month or in a year but at least once a week. Remember how romantic life was before you were married? It was because you had fewer responsibilities, more time, and puppy love in your favor.

Through the course of life, that puppy love fades for some. Priorities take the place of fun; lack of sleep from a newborn takes a toll on energy; and working many hours to provide can sap away your time. A person can spend more time acting out love toward his or her children than being in love with his or her spouse.

To this day, however, I have never lost that puppy love with my wife. It has only grown year after year, and she still gives me butterflies. What we have isn’t impossible for others to enjoy as well. All you need to do is maintain the same interest you had in your spouse at day one and spend as much quality time with him or her as possible.

My wife and I take every opportunity we can get. At the end of every day, we send the children to bed a little early and take the time to talk. Sometimes we make it a date night and order out, watch a movie, or play a game. But most nights we spend sharing our hearts, studying the Bible, and making each other laugh.

I like to say that the two greatest things that cause my wife and I to be so tightly knit are fellowship and friendship. We take the time for fellowship, and every moment is friendship. My wife is and always will be my best friend. If your

spouse isn't your best friend, then I would beg you to change that today.

I knew a woman named Beverly whose husband Frank spent more time with a friend of his than with her. Their marriage waned, and they constantly had fights. Most of the fights were due to the time he spent with someone or something else.

"Don't you love me?" Beverly asked him.

"Well, I married you, didn't I?"

"Then why do you spend more working on your project car, or with Dan, than with me?"

"What are you talking about, woman? I spend every day and night with you. I go to bed with you! I'm always around you!"

"But every free moment you have you spend with someone else!"

"Well, of course! 'Cause every free moment I don't have I spend with you!"

Frank couldn't seem to understand that his wife wanted quality time. He felt his presence was enough. He was there for her physically but not emotionally. Their marriage dried up when their friendship did. Frank had a difficult time realizing that one should never distinguish between being your wife's friend and being married to her.

When you put that ring on your finger, you are saying to your spouse, "We're going to be best friends forever!" If you're saying anything else, your heart isn't right.

Some people care more about doing other things or about other friends than they do about their own spouse. But the spouse should come first. Was your wedding ring given to your spouse or to a group of friends? Was the gift of your eternal love handed to that activity or entertainment you love so much or to your spouse?

Sometimes leeches like to form in marriage. As an idol is to God, so a leech is to a marriage: a distraction. Take the time to ask yourself if there is anything distracting you from your spouse. If there is anything that takes away quality time with your spouse, or takes away emotional attraction, you have a leech. Leeches can come in the form of entertainment, a group of friends, a hobby, something you're passionate about, or even pornography.

Take the time to identify anything that could be taking your time, emotion,

attraction, or friendship away from your spouse. If there is any such distraction, remove it and put your spouse first. If you don't, it will lead to endless roads of hurt, remorse, and regret.

I once knew a pastor who became addicted to an online video game. Gradually, his daytime hour with his wife was consumed. Then the night was taken. He spent countless hours wasting his life away before a computer. Before long this caused some heated arguments. She wanted quality time with him, and he'd agree to have it with her—but then he just needed to finish that level first. Or he couldn't leave his friends fighting that big monster alone. His character was at a higher level, so they needed him, after all.

So night after night, she would wait for him on the sofa, but he'd never come. Or when he did, they'd have less than a half hour together. Eventually she'd turn the movie on and watch without him. He'd keep playing, thinking she was into the movie and didn't care anymore whether he showed up. But she did, and his neglect broke her heart, especially when it was a romantic movie. She'd watch the man woo the woman, and she'd remember how he used to do that. Rather than enjoying the night with her husband, then, she found herself distraught and crying on her couch, wishing she had a better friendship with him.

At a certain point, she stopped waiting for him and gave up on their friendship. She went to bed so often without him that she no longer welcomed him in bed with her. So he slept on the couch in the basement with his computer. This ended up being the worst move of all. Because his bed was next to the computer and he didn't have his wife begging him to come to bed, he spent as much time as he wanted playing on his computer at night. So Satan took advantage of his opportunity.

During the late hours of the night, when he was weakest and most easily tempted, he gave in to looking at pornography. He wasn't intimate with his wife anymore, mainly because she didn't let him be. So as a measure of revenge, he looked at other women who appealed to him more. Then his wife caught him in the middle of his actions.

Could you imagine the look on her face? Could you imagine what she felt and how devastated she was? Every sin has a root, and it always branches out into more sin if it isn't removed. His video game was an idol before God and a leech in his marriage. Rather than getting rid of his addiction, however, he made choices that led to more addictions and marital issues.

To make matters worse, this man was once a spiritual pastor who oversaw a church of two hundred people. None of them realized this was going on behind closed doors because he hid it all. So it doesn't matter how spiritual you are: A leech is a leech. Identify it and get rid of it, or it will ruin your marriage and your relationship with God.

Try to take as much time to build a friendship with your spouse as you can. If you don't have any hobbies in common, find one. But especially take the time for fellowship. Read and study the word together. Pray together as much as possible. Write a list of family needs. Pray for your children and pray over your children. Pray for anything God lays in your heart.

Take the time to worship as well. Sit down, whether as a family or with only your spouse, and adore the Lord together. I can never emphasize enough that the more time you spend drawing nearer to the Lord together, the more your marriage will improve. Remember that even if you don't have anything else in common with your spouse, you both have God.

The Prayer

Lord, I devote myself to becoming my spouse's best friend. Help me to cultivate a relationship with him (her). Give me wisdom to accomplish this. I pray that you would help me through conviction to uphold this and that you would hold me accountable for any leeches or idols I may acquire. If any exist in my life, please convict me so I can repent and get right with you and my spouse.

I Will Submit to Your Blueprint, Lord

At this time I have to mention the word some women hate to hear. It's that bad S word that American feminism commands men not to say to their wives: submission.

God calls the man to lead. But if he leads the wife astray, he will have an account to give as Eve did. However, if you read the Scriptures carefully, they don't actually call the man to lead per se. Rather, the Scriptures say that God must lead and that God will lead through the man. So if the man isn't seeking the Lord and being led by God, then who is leading your family?

There was once a couple who were in a heated argument. The husband then pulled the submission card, and the wife wouldn't have it. "Why would God call me to submit to an imperfect man?" she retorted.

At this, the husband shook his fist and roared back, "And why would God call me to lead an imperfect woman?"

The moral of the story is that nobody is perfect. So if both men and women are imperfect, then we should just submit to God, who is.

Now, I have heard many people say, "Submission was a cultural thing back in ancient times. Women don't have to do it now." But actually, all women submitted to their husbands in almost every single culture and country since the beginning of time—until the United States experienced the feminist movement.

It is important to note that feminists have often tried to equate the feminist movement with the women's rights movement. However, there is a tremendous difference between a woman's right to vote and suggesting to women that they should live like men. These two movements have always been, and always will be, two separate events.

Incidentally, some of the women who are at the forefront of feminism are lesbians. Have you noticed that the doctrine of life a lesbian lives is that of feminism? It is their personal belief, and through American doctrine they are influencing the women in the church to live like men, as they themselves want to do.

A major proponent of feminism, Ti-Grace Atkinson, founded a group called "the Feminists." The motto of the group is a famous saying of Atkinson's: "Feminism

is the theory, and lesbianism is the practice.” This group first advocated that women should lead celibate lives to protest male superiority. Later, they advocated political lesbianism. The feminists then began to advocate matriarchy and tried to turn feminism into a “woman’s religion.”

America embraces this doctrine, and it has affected many families throughout the nation. Even if a family doesn’t subscribe to feminism per se, they are practicing it if the wife leads and the husband submits. Women in the church are then affected by this doctrine because they are raised with it in the schools and inundated with it in popular culture.

So it is the American culture that has affected the church in this way. But God has called a woman to be feminine, not feminist. Non-submissiveness is cultural in origin, and submissiveness is biblical.

If you’re going to call yourself a follower of Christ, then you must obey the word of God. If you are a man, then God commands you to be led by Him and to lead your wife through Him. If you are a woman, then God commands you to be led by your husband. But why would the Lord call a woman to be led? It begins with this curse:

“To the woman He said: ‘I will greatly multiply your sorrow and your conception; in pain you shall bring forth children; your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you.’” Genesis 3:16

Some may say, “Well, Jesus freed us from the curse, so why should I submit now?” But Jesus has not freed us from the curse entirely yet. If you don’t believe me, try having a pain-free birth or stepping in front of a quickly moving train. Painful childbearing and death are part of the curse. If you still have sorrow when birthing or still die, then you’re still under the curse while you wait for redemption.

“But I’ve been redeemed! He set me free!” I’ve heard some say. But has He already redeemed? What does the word say?

“In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.” Ephesians 1:13–14

You have been purchased, and the Holy Spirit has been given as a deposit until the redemption. So we are still waiting for God to redeem that purchase—as one

may claim a holiday gift on layaway. Some Christian musicians have influenced doctrine by singing that we are already redeemed. However, the word says that we have been purchased and, when Jesus returns, He will redeem us. The original Greek word for 'redeem' in this passage is *apōlutrōsis*, which literally means "to *ransom* in full." A good comparison is winning the lottery: We are at a point in this life when we have the winning ticket in hand but have not yet turned it over to redeem the money.

The redemption happens in the last day, when the Lord receives us to His side and gives us a new body. When we have the new body, we will never sin, nor will we die. Hence, we have been redeemed from the wages of sin and death. As it is written,

"So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: 'Death is swallowed up in victory.' 'O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?'" 1 Corinthians 15:54–55

Jesus has not yet descended from heaven and gathered us all to His side. Until He does, the curse will continue on this earth as it always has. Therefore, if you as a woman still have pain in childbearing and you will still die one day, you should still be ruled by your husband. As we also read,

"Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish. So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself." Ephesians 5:22–28

Now, the main points of this scripture are (1) that she is to submit to her husband as she does to God Himself and (2) that the husband is to sanctify her in the word in order to present her as a glorious woman of God, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing but, rather, being holy and without blemish. So to those who ask, "Why should I submit?" the Lord says, "So that I may cleanse you through your husband." And to those who say, "Why should I submit to an imperfect man?" the Lord says, "Submit to me through the man."

Therefore, if you do not submit to your husband, then neither do you submit to God or to the word of God. Rather, the word of God will be blasphemed if you aren't submissive. The Scriptures explain this in describing "sound doctrine":

"...that they admonish the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, homemakers, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be blasphemed." Titus 2:4-5

How can you call yourself Christian if you blaspheme His word? As it is written, "For by grace you have been saved through faith..." Ephesians 2:8

And how do you come by faith? As the Scriptures also tell us,

"...faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." Romans 10:17

Therefore, you are saved by believing and practicing the word of God. As we also read,

"Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect?" James 2:22

And again,

"You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only." James 2:24

And lastly,

"For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also." James 2:26

If our faith is dead, then how are we saved? But if your faith is alive, then let it show by submitting to and living out the word of God.

Ultimately, submitting to your husband is not about your husband or your relationship with him; it's about the Lord. If you're going to submit to God, then you have to submit to God who is in your husband as well. Why? Because it's the way God designed marriage. It wasn't my choice, but I take a lot of flak from certain women for preaching this. Anyone who wants to argue the point is arguing with God and His design, not with me.

Understanding why you should submit to your husband is key to understanding how you can be an encouragement to your husband. God doesn't say, "Submit to an imperfect man," but rather, "Submit to God in the man." That way, God can

lead you through the man. This doesn't mean you get to pick and choose when God is speaking and working through your husband and when He isn't. If you're sinning without realizing it, how can you be rebuked if you pick and choose when to listen? Whatever your husband tells you won't line up with your heart at such a time. So the husband must have full authority as God commands; and as you would submit to God, so you must submit to your husband in everything. Not in certain matters only, but in everything:

“Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything.” Ephesians 5:24

Why would God tell you to do this? So that He can have full authority over you through your husband, His tool. So the question is not, “Can you believe that God will use your husband to lead you?” Rather, the question you must ask yourself is, “Do you believe God is able to lead you through your husband?” If He is able and has told you that He will do it, then believe God and submit by faith. This will be righteous submission because it has become an act of faith for you as you believe God will work through it. So having faith in His word is your salvation.

If the man is the head, then the woman is the heart. The man is affected deeply by the woman. So how can you, the wife, affect your husband positively in submission? Constantly encourage him to submit to God as much as you submit to your husband. Encourage your husband to make all his decisions through the guidance of the Holy Spirit—not just the major decisions but the little day-to-day ones as well. What you do daily determines who you are more than impressive but occasional actions do. The little things always add up to the greater. After all, many small steps are required to go up a flight of stairs. So encourage your husband to inquire of the Lord constantly and to make each step the family takes, no matter how small, a step taken in the Lord.

God has given each person a role in marriage. If you want to live a Christ-centered marriage, then you need to submit to that design. So take up your roles exactly as outlined in the Bible. God created the mold. Therefore, as the clay of God, conform to His mold, and you'll find the deepest sense of meaning in your marriage.

God created marriage and ordained how it should be conducted and lived out. Following His design will lead to the greatest peace. Why? Because in His design, neither man nor woman is in charge. Rather, God is in charge. However, He communicates the message through the man, as we read:

“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.” Ephesians 5:25–27

As Christ presents His bride to Himself blameless and spotless, even so a husband must minister Christ to his wife to present her spotless to Him. He is called to be the teacher of the spiritual things. He leads his wife as he follows God. And she follows him as he follows the Lord. Thus, by submitting to him, she is submitting to Christ and not merely to the man.

Knowing this, a man is not to lead his wife according to his own heart, lest he lead her astray. He must abide continually, listen to the Holy Spirit, and obey and follow Him. That way, God will lead the wife through the husband. This is why the Scriptures command the wife to submit to her husband as to the Lord—because the husband must submit to the Lord. As he submits to God, his wife will be submitting to the Lord by submitting to her husband.

In leading his wife, a husband must love her with self-sacrificing, unconditional love, even as Christ loves His Church. Jesus laid down His life, and a husband also must be willing to lay down his life for his wife. This applies not only in life-or-death situations but also in terms of daily sacrifices to lead his wife in the love of Christ.

A man must forgo the desires of his heart to put those of his wife and children first. Obviously, above their desires come the Lord’s. Therefore, a husband must submit to God’s heart first, self-sacrificing to the Lord, and afterward place the needs and wants of his family above his own. Remember that, figuratively speaking, Jesus led His disciples on His knees. He made Himself a servant of those whom He led, for if Christ did not serve us, no one could be saved. Now, if the Lord of all would humble Himself and serve, how much more should His servants be found doing the same? Thus, a man must be humble in his leading, doing all things through the love of Christ.

So I ask husbands, “How have you been leading your wife in the Holy Spirit and washing her in the water of the word?” God will call you to give an account of how you led your wife. He has handed His precious daughter to you as He would a seed, and you are commanded to return her back to God fully grown, with blossoming flowers and much fruit.

Having a wife is like having a ministry. A husband is to his wife as Moses was to Israel, or as Jesus is to the church. So if you are not acting like Jesus and cleansing her through the word, you'll have to explain to God why you led her astray and fouled the beautiful girl He gave you.

How do you think God will respond to you if you testify that you defiled her soul? How would any father respond to a man who defiles his daughter? Take this to heart and lead your wife in the Spirit and love of God.

Now, I know I'm using some bold words in this prayer. But there is no easy way to explain these truths. Some things need to be said bluntly because of the influence American doctrine, and ultimately I cannot and will not apologize for the gospel. The word says what it does, and if we are to live godly, Christian lives, then we must submit to His word. As we mentioned before,

“For by grace you have been saved through faith...” Ephesians 2:8

And as we also read,

“...faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” Romans 10:17

You are saved by believing and practicing the word of God. ‘Christian’ literally means “follower of Christ.” How are we being Christian if we aren't following Jesus by living out His word daily?

Knowing this, a man must take to heart to study his Bible diligently. How can you practice what you do not know? How can you teach your wife if you need to be taught as well?

But whether you are grown in the Lord or not doesn't change the fact that you must lead your wife now. And likewise, a woman must not wait for her husband to grow in order to submit to him. If a husband is weak in the Lord and a woman still submits, this convicts the husband to grow and walk in the Lord. As we read,

“Wives, likewise, be submissive to your own husbands, that even if some do not obey the word, they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives, when they observe your chaste conduct accompanied by fear.” 1 Peter 3:1–2

Submission as outlined in the Scriptures forces a man of God to grow. As we also read,

“Let your women keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak;

but they are to be submissive, as the law also says.

“And if they want to learn something, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is shameful for women to speak in church.” 1 Corinthians 14:34–35

If a woman takes this to heart and asks her husband a question regarding God’s word and he doesn’t know the answer, he is required to seek it. The husband is thereby encouraged to grow personally with the Lord and then communicate the messages God gives him to his wife. By this the two develop a greater unity than if they were to seek the Lord individually.

A married man should be a well-educated man. We know that we are all taught by God, so a husband must take to heart to constantly seek the Lord’s teaching and to grow in discerning His voice. That way, he can lead his wife properly. So study your Bible, men of God, until you come to know it like the back of your hand. For God has called you no longer to be a youth but to rise up to lead the next generation.

If a man doesn’t lead his family and rule it well, he is setting up his family for catastrophe. I once knew a man, whom we will call Larry, who was married to a woman we will call Debbie (I am changing their names for their sakes). Larry loved the Lord but didn’t take it to heart to lead his wife or to grow as diligently as he should have. Instead he was caught up with working his job, living life, and being a father.

Then, after thirty years, he felt a strong pull to act as an elder. He examined his own life and saw that everything was falling apart by the seams because he didn’t maintain his walk or his marriage. At first, all had seemed well with his marriage, and his wife was happy to follow God however she thought and felt was right. But because he chose to be completely hands-off, she ended up attending a different church than he did.

“Well, Adam, I met her at a Christian concert. She attended a different church at the time. She was walking just fine before I met her, so why would that change now? If she attended a different church when we first got together, why would that matter now?” he asked me while venting about his marital issues.

But this church wasn’t like the others either of them had attended. It seemed well for her at first, but as time went on, the church slowly focused more on the touchy-feely and less on the meat of the gospel. A change in leadership occurred, and a few years later, the church was unrecognizable. Debbie followed along with the whole trend, and Larry was completely oblivious to it. He wasn’t

involved in her life, and it led to her having some cult-like beliefs.

Then, when he decided to take responsibility to be the man and lead his wife, disaster followed. He began by growing in the word, and not too long after that, he noticed the corrupt doctrine in his wife's church. So he took charge and told her to leave and to join his church.

Well, she didn't take too kindly to that demand since she had been going to her church for over fifteen years now. So she fought back and insisted that he should leave his church and join hers. Often I was invited to their house, and it wasn't a pretty sight for me to see these two Christians, who had been saved for over forty years, bickering at a table like children.

Her church insisted she should stay and that her husband had no right or authority to lead her. So she came back home one day shaking her finger and calling him Satan. "You're the devil, Larry!" she snapped, "and I ain't gonna let the devil control my life! I'm gonna serve Jesus my way!"

It wasn't too long after that when she began threaten to divorce him. Her peers from church suggested it, for they were involving themselves her marriage. Watching this happen to my two friends shook me to the core. When I first met Larry and Debbie, these two people loved each other sincerely. They didn't always agree and didn't always get along, but they both loved the Lord and each other. Now, because he chose to take his walk and role in marriage more seriously, he was on the brink of a divorce. He finally stepped out to honor God, and the devil stepped out to slap him in the face for it.

The main reason she wanted a divorce was because she didn't feel she should have to leave her church and friends that she'd had for over fifteen years. To some extent, her point of view was understandable. He had let her follow God and live her life however she wanted for thirty years. On the other hand, however, she was wrong because she was putting those friends above her husband. Friends don't come first; your spouse does. She would rather have divorced him and kept her friends—and she honestly felt that way. That's when Larry came to me.

"I can't believe I'm actually saying this to you, Adam, but I'm on the verge of a divorce! I'm Christian! I never thought in a million years that my marriage would end like this." But being Christian doesn't determine whether your marriage will be successful or not. Whether you choose to apply the principles of Christ or not decides this.

Larry recognized the warfare with which he was struggling for stepping out to obey the Scriptures. He chose to stay in the fight and seek a way both to keep his marriage and to take up his role in obedience. Through much persistence, love, and persuasion, Larry was able to convince his wife. It took much time and faithfulness, but God saved his marriage in the end. Although this was hard for Debbie at first, once her eyes were opened to the truth, she saw the need to leave her church and conform to the word of God.

Satan will always confront you when you step out to honor the Lord. God allows this to test your heart in order to see whether you will continue to honor the Lord earnestly or cave in to pressure and sin. Larry wanted to cave in, but he didn't. Of course, if he had chosen to honor the Lord from day one, he never would have suffered this trial.

So don't let what happened to Larry happen to you. There's no better time than today to take up your role. But if you've been married for many years and are only taking such steps now, don't expect them to go well at first. The enemy will intervene to stop you.

A husband may not want to lead his wife. However, if she submits, he will be convicted over time to honor the Lord and grow in His word. If the man leads his wife—not forcefully but gently and lovingly, with a servant's heart as Jesus leads us—then his wife through time and gentle persuasion will conform herself to God's design and be encouraged to grow in the Lord.

So commit your marriage to God's blueprint. He knows what He's doing. If leading or submission sounds like a hard thing for you, then just do it by faith. Besides, faith should lead every one of your actions, anyway.

The Prayer

Lord, You invented marriage. I believe that You know it better than anyone else. So I commit my marriage to conform to the pattern of Your design. Teach me how to take up my role and to honor You in it.

I'd Love to Hear from You!

As an author, I regard the feedback of my readers highly. When considering a book, many people weigh reviews in the balance.

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About the Author

Adam is a preacher, teacher, and #1 internationally bestselling author of over 60 books on the Christian faith. He is a devoted husband and father of three boys. Through his travels, he's seen the need for a new awakening and a new revival—a revival of the heart. Come join Adam on this journey of redemption, and experience God like never before!

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