

GRACE-FILLED JOURNEYS

Love, Family, and Faith

Father Kathembo Tsongo Dieudonne a.a

Publication House:
2025

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GRACE-FILLED JOURNEYS: Love, Family, and Faith

About the Author

Father Kathembo Tsongo Dieudonné is a religious priest belonging to the congregation of the Augustinians of the Assumption. Born in Mutwanga, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), he joined the congregation in 2008 as a pre-postulant and professed his religious vows in 2010. Father Dieudonné pursued his philosophical studies at ISEAB, now known as UAC (*Université de l'Assomption au Congo*), where he earned a BA in Philosophy. In 2014, he was assigned to Nairobi, Kenya, where he undertook his theological studies at Hekima University College, a Jesuit institution, earning a BA in Theology. He was ordained to the priesthood in 2019.

In 2020, one year after his ordination, Father Dieudonné enrolled at Strathmore University to study Business Information Technology. He completed a diploma in the field and decided to further his education, pursuing a Bachelor of Business Information Technology (BBIT), a program he successfully completed in August 2024.

Father Dieudonné's pastoral ministry took a significant turn in 2020 when he was invited by the family of Jackson and Reginah to celebrate a Mass and pray for four families for whom they were Godparents. After this gathering, the community of five families requested that Father Dieudonné become their spiritual father. Despite being a newly ordained priest, he trusted in God's grace and accepted the request, beginning a spiritual journey with these couples, who referred to themselves as "*Familia Zetu*" (Our Family).

The group initially comprised five families and grew to nine families before expanding to include the parish level. Under his guidance, the group held three annual seminars: in January, June, and December. Currently, Father Dieudonné serves as the Chaplain for Families at Saint

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Monica Parish, Njiru, continuing his dedication to supporting and nurturing Christian families.

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Aknowledgment

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INTRODUCTION

Marriage is not merely a partnership; it is a covenant deeply rooted in divine purpose. In today's world, couples face a variety of complexities, from financial strains and cultural differences to the pressures of parenting and ethical dilemmas. Thriving in marriage requires intentionality, mutual understanding, and the ever-present guidance of God's grace. This book is a trusted companion for couples navigating the joys and trials of married life. Drawing from biblical wisdom, Church teachings, cultural traditions, psychological insights, and real-life experiences, it provides practical tools and reflections to strengthen their bond. It addresses essential themes of love, family, and faith, offering guidance to help couples grow through every challenge they encounter. Whether they are newlyweds beginning this sacred journey or seasoned partners seeking renewal, this book encourages them to reflect on their shared purpose, grow in love, and deepen their commitment to each other and to God.

Marriage is not just about enduring difficulties—it is about flourishing together as you embrace the opportunities for unity and grace that life presents. Let **Grace-Filled Journeys** inspire you to embrace the beauty and complexity of married life. Through faith, love, and intentional effort, you can overcome obstacles, nurture a lasting connection, and build a joyful union that reflects the grace of God. Together, may you find strength, wisdom, and hope to make your marriage a source of love and light in the world.

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CHAPTER 1: NATURING LOVE IN MARRIAGE

Marriage is a journey of love, partnership, and growth, but it can also face its fair share of challenges. Over time, the demands of life, miscommunication, and unresolved frustrations can create distance between partners, leaving love strained or even diminished. These moments of disconnect can feel overwhelming, but they also present an opportunity to rekindle and strengthen the bond that brought you together. Nurturing love in a marriage requires intentionality, patience, and effort from both partners. Through open communication, revisiting cherished memories, and taking proactive steps to reconnect, couples can rediscover the joy and intimacy that first sparked their relationship. Love is not static; it is a dynamic force that needs consistent care and renewal. In this chapter, we explore five essential steps to help you nurture and restore love in your marriage, turning moments of challenge into opportunities for deeper connection and growth.



1.1. Open Communication

- How often do you and your spouse engage in meaningful conversations about your feelings, hopes, and concerns?
- Are there barriers in your communication that need to be addressed, such as assumptions or fear of conflict?
- What steps can you take to create a safe space for open and honest dialogue in your marriage?

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In any relationship, particularly in marriage, open and honest communication is crucial for resolving conflicts and rekindling love. Start by having a heartfelt conversation about the current state of your relationship. Both partners should express their feelings, concerns, and needs openly, without blame or judgment. This kind of dialogue creates a safe space for understanding each other's perspectives and fosters a deeper emotional connection. The Bible encourages us in Ephesians 4:15 to "speak the truth in love," reminding us that honesty, tempered with kindness and patience, is essential for healing and growth in any relationship.

The Church strongly emphasizes the importance of communication in marriage, as highlighted in *Familiaris Consortio*, where St. John Paul II speaks of the need for a "dialogue of love" between spouses. He encourages couples to embrace this dialogue, which involves recognizing both the spiritual and physical dimensions of marital communion. This means living out personal love with its demands for fidelity while acknowledging and nurturing the values of tenderness and affection, which are the essence of human sexuality, including its physical aspect¹. Such dialogue goes beyond merely sharing thoughts; it also involves listening with empathy and compassion. By actively engaging in this kind of communication, couples can rebuild trust and intimacy, laying a strong foundation for rekindling love that may have diminished. Through open and sincere communication, couples invite God's grace into their relationship, allowing love to flourish and strengthen once more.

¹ John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio* (Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on the Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World), November 22, 1981, Vatican, paragraph 32.

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1.2. Revisit Shared Memories

- What are some of your most cherished memories as a couple, and how do they reflect your love and commitment?
- How can revisiting these memories inspire you to rekindle the bond you share?
- Have you taken time recently to create new meaningful memories together? If not, what's stopping you?

The Bible often encourages believers to remember the past as a way of strengthening both faith and relationships. In Revelation 2:5, we are reminded, "Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first." While this verse is addressed to a church, it offers valuable insight for marriages as well. It urges couples to reflect on the early days of their relationship—the moments that first brought them together, the joy they shared, and the reasons they chose each other. By revisiting these cherished memories, couples can reignite the affection and connection that may have diminished over time.

Pope Francis, in *Amoris Laetitia*, also highlights the importance of nurturing shared memories, noting that they are "a sign of hope" and a means of experiencing the enduring presence of love. In paragraph 193, he warns against the dangers of losing historical memory, stating that "a mentality that can only say, 'Then was then, now is now,' is ultimately immature." He emphasizes that understanding and reflecting on past experiences is essential for building a meaningful future². By recalling the good times and the experiences that have shaped their relationship, couples are reminded of the strong bond they share, even when current circumstances are challenging. Deliberately reflecting on and celebrating

² Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia: The Joy of Love* (Vatican City: Vatican Press, 2016), paragraph 193.

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these memories can help couples strengthen their emotional connection and restore the love that may have been overshadowed by the struggles of daily life.

1.3. Prioritize Quality Time Together

- How do you currently spend quality time with your spouse, and are there areas where you could improve?
- What activities or moments bring you the most joy as a couple? How can you incorporate them into your routine?
- Are there distractions (e.g., work, technology, or other obligations) that take away from your time together? How can you minimize them?

Prioritizing quality time together is essential for nurturing and revitalizing a marriage. Togetherness and unity are well highlighted in Ecclesiastes 4:9-10: "Two are better than one because they have a good reward for their labor. For if they fall, one will lift up his companion." This scripture reminds couples of the strength found in companionship and the value of investing time in one another. By intentionally spending time together, away from the distractions of daily life, couples can reconnect emotionally and deepen their bond. Simple activities like regular date nights, taking walks together, or engaging in shared hobbies can foster a sense of unity and bring joy back into the relationship.

Still in *Amoris Laetitia*, Pope Francis emphasizes the importance of nurturing marital relationships through shared experiences. He advises couples to "cultivate moments of stillness" where they can "renew their dialogue with one another". In paragraph 224, he says this:

"Love needs time and space; everything else is secondary. Time is needed to talk things over, to embrace leisurely, to share plans, to listen to one other and gaze in each other's eyes, to appreciate one another and to build a stronger relationship. Sometimes the

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frenetic pace of our society and the pressures of the workplace create problems."³

These moments of intentional togetherness allow couples to rediscover the joy of each other's company and the reasons they fell in love. In a world filled with distractions, setting aside time to focus solely on each other is a powerful way to strengthen the marital bond. By making quality time a priority, couples can create an environment where love can flourish, supported by mutual understanding and renewed emotional connection.

1.4. Practice Gratitude and Appreciation

- When was the last time you expressed heartfelt gratitude to your spouse for something he did?
- Do you notice and acknowledge your spouse's efforts to contribute to your relationship?
- How can cultivating a habit of gratitude and appreciation strengthen your connection as a couple?

Gratitude and appreciation are powerful tools for nurturing love and positivity in a marriage. As St. Paul advises the Thessalonians, "Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus" (1 Thessalonians 5:18). This biblical wisdom reminds us that maintaining an attitude of gratitude, even in difficult times, can transform our relationships. When you focus on the positive aspects of your partner and regularly express appreciation, you create an environment where love can flourish. As the proverb goes, "A thankful heart is not only the greatest virtue, but the parent of all other virtues." Simple gestures, like saying "thank you," acknowledging your partner's efforts, or performing small acts of kindness, can have a profound impact

³ Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia: The Joy of Love* (Vatican City: Vatican Press, 2016), paragraph 224.

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on your relationship. These expressions of gratitude shift the focus from what might be lacking to the blessings that are already present, bringing warmth and renewal into the marriage. As another proverb wisely states, "Gratitude turns what we have into enough." By cultivating gratitude, you foster a positive atmosphere that strengthens the bond between you and your partner, helping love to grow and endure.

By practicing gratitude, couples make room for love to flourish. Appreciating your partner's strengths and contributions builds a positive atmosphere where both partners feel valued and respected. This mutual appreciation fosters a deeper emotional connection and helps to counteract the negativity that can sometimes creep into relationships. In essence, gratitude acts as a reminder of the love that brought you together, and by nurturing this spirit of thankfulness, couples can rekindle their affection and deepen their bond.

1.5. Seek Professional Support

- Are there recurring challenges in your marriage that may benefit from the guidance of a counselor or trusted advisor?
- How open are you and your spouse to seeking outside help when needed?
- What fears or misconceptions might be preventing you from reaching out for professional support, and how can you overcome them?

Seeking professional support in marriage is an important and sometimes necessary step to nurture and sustain the marital relationship. The Church recognizes that it can be challenging, even daunting, to commit oneself for life to another human being⁴. In times when couples

⁴ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed. (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997), sec. 1648

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become deeply estranged, external assistance is often needed to restore the relationship. Reconciliation, through the grace of God and the cooperation of a professional counselor, can be vital in this process. This highlights that marriage is not only a personal commitment but also a sacrament that sometimes requires the wisdom and guidance of others to truly thrive.

St. John Paul II, in *Familiaris Consortio* (84), emphasized that "pastors and the whole community of the faithful must support married couples in times of difficulty, guiding them to seek appropriate help."⁵ By seeking professional support, couples open themselves to the possibility of healing and growth, inviting God's grace into their relationship through the expertise and counsel of trained professionals. This step is an act of humility and faith, recognizing that with the right guidance and divine assistance, even the most challenging situations can be transformed, leading to a renewed and stronger marital bond.

A marriage counselor or therapist can offer valuable tools and strategies to help couples address underlying issues, improve communication, and rebuild their emotional connection. Proverbs 15:22 reminds us, "Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed." Couples should understand that seeking guidance from a professional is not a sign of weakness but a proactive step toward healing and growth. The Church teaches that marriage is a lifelong commitment, and investing in its well-being is crucial. A professional can help couples uncover unresolved issues, enhance communication, and guide them in rebuilding trust and intimacy. By turning to professional support, couples are not only working to improve their relationship but also inviting God's

⁵ John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio* (Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on the Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World), November 22, 1981, Vatican, paragraph 84.

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grace into the healing process, ultimately strengthening their marital bond.

An example from my own experience as a counselor and priest is the story of a couple. This couple came to me when their marriage was on the edge of collapse. After several years together, they found themselves drifting apart, caught in a cycle of constant arguments and misunderstandings. Communication had broken down, and they were seriously considering separation. When the couple reached out for help, we began working together to uncover the root causes of their conflicts. Through our sessions, they learned how to express their feelings and needs more openly and to listen to each other with empathy. I guided them in rebuilding the trust that had been eroded over time, offering practical tools to resolve conflicts and reconnect emotionally. Gradually, they were able to rekindle the love and commitment that had brought them together in the first place. Watching the couple rediscover their bond and strengthen their relationship was a powerful reminder of the transformative impact that seeking professional support can have on a marriage.

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CHAPTER 2: PARENTING IN THE MODERN WORLD

Parenting is one of the most sacred and rewarding responsibilities of marriage. In the rapidly changing world of today, raising children presents unique challenges, from navigating technology to teaching values and balancing work with family life. Yet, it also offers unparalleled opportunities to shape the next generation with love, wisdom, and faith. This chapter provides practical advice grounded in biblical principles, Church teachings, African proverbs, and psychological insights to help families navigate the complexities of parenting in the modern world.



2.1. Understanding Your Role as Parents

- How do you see your role as your child's first and most important educator?
- What values and beliefs do you want to instill in your children, and how are you modeling these in your daily life?
- How do you support your child emotionally, and what steps can you take to create a loving and supportive environment at home?

As parents, you are your children's first and most important educators, responsible for shaping their values, beliefs, and behavior.

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The foundational role you play in their lives goes far beyond providing for their physical needs; it involves nurturing their spiritual, moral, and emotional development. Proverbs 22:6 says “Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it.” This verse highlights the sacred duty of teaching godly principles and virtues in your children, setting them on a path that will guide them throughout their lives.

The proverb’s wisdom lies in recognizing that children are like tender plants, requiring careful cultivation. Just as a farmer trains a vine to grow in the right direction by providing support and pruning away what hinders growth, parents are called to provide guidance and discipline that aligns with their children’s unique gifts and potential. For instance, if a child shows compassion and a heart for serving others, parents can nurture this quality by encouraging acts of kindness, such as helping a neighbor or volunteering as a family. Such intentional efforts instill lifelong values of empathy and service.

This responsibility also involves leading by example. Children learn not only from what they are taught but also from what they observe. If parents model respect, honesty, and faithfulness in their daily lives, children are more likely to adopt these traits as they grow. Conversely, if a parent demonstrates anger or dishonesty, children may struggle to overcome those influences later in life. There is an African proverb that says “The child who is not embraced by the village will burn it down to feel its warmth.” This wisdom serves as a powerful reminder that children need intentional guidance and support to prosper emotionally and morally.

An example of this principle in action is seen in families that make prayer or devotionals a daily practice. Parents who consistently pray with their children or read scripture together create a strong spiritual foundation that children carry into adulthood. These routines become a

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living example of Proverbs 22:6, showing how early training leaves a lasting impact. Whether through words of encouragement, setting healthy boundaries, or celebrating achievements, every effort you make to guide your child shapes their identity and prepares them for the challenges of life.

2.2. Navigating Technology and Media

- How do you set boundaries for your child's use of technology, including screen time and content?
- Are you modeling balanced and responsible technology use for your children?
- How can you educate your children about online safety and the importance of discernment in the digital age?

Technology has become an integral part of modern life, offering both incredible opportunities for learning and connectivity and significant challenges for parents. While it provides children access to vast educational resources and tools for creativity, it also exposes them to risks such as inappropriate content, and overuse. Traversing this digital landscape requires intentional effort from parents to set boundaries, model responsible behavior, and educate their children on using technology wisely and safely. Some strategies needed in this context:

2.2.1 Setting Boundaries

Psalms 101:3 says, "I will not set before my eyes anything that is worthless." This verse serves as a reminder to protect our minds and hearts from harmful influences. For parents, this means establishing clear limits on screen time and organizing the type of content children should access. Set age-appropriate boundaries using parental controls on devices and apps to ensure children are engaging with content that aligns

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with your family values. Beyond rules, discuss the purpose of technology with your children, emphasizing its potential as a tool for learning, connection, and creativity. For example, designate specific times for screen use, such as educational apps during study hours or video calls with relatives, while avoiding excessive entertainment consumption.

2.2.2 Being Role Models

Children often emulate their parents' behavior, including how they use technology. Matthew 5:16 encourages us to “Let our light shine before others, that they may see our good deeds.” As a parent, your actions speak louder than words. Demonstrate thoughtful use of technology by maintaining a balance between digital interaction and personal connection. Avoid excessive phone use during family meals or conversations, showing your children that relationships take precedence over screens. For instance, prioritize family activities like playing board games or reading together instead of retreating to individual devices. This not only builds stronger family bonds but also teaches your children the value of moderation and presence.

2.2.3 Educating About Online Safety

In an increasingly connected world, educating children about online safety is non-negotiable. Matthew 10:16 advises, “Be wise as serpents and innocent as doves.” This balance of wisdom and innocence is essential in guiding children to navigate the internet responsibly. Teach them about the importance of privacy, such as not sharing personal information or passwords online. Discuss the potential dangers of cyberbullying and predatory behavior, and empower them to seek help if they encounter uncomfortable situations. There is one proverb in African that says “The drumbeat changes, and so must the dancer.” This proverb reminds us of the need to adapt to new realities. Technology, like a new drumbeat, requires parents to evolve their approaches to

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parenting, ensuring that their children are equipped to prosper in a digital world while staying grounded in their values.

Managing technology and media in parenting involves more than just setting rules; it requires intentional modeling, open communication, and ongoing education. By setting boundaries, being role models, and teaching online safety, parents can empower their children to use technology responsibly and positively. This balanced approach ensures that technology enhances, rather than detracts from, their growth and family relationships.

2.3. Balancing Work and Family Life

- How do you currently prioritize quality time with your family amidst work and other responsibilities?
- Are there areas in your schedule where you could create more opportunities for meaningful family interactions?
- How do you maintain open communication within your family, ensuring everyone feels heard and valued?

In today's demanding world, achieving a balance between work and family life is essential to fostering a nurturing environment for your children. While the pressures of work are unavoidable, the time and attention you invest in your family create a foundation of love, security, and trust. Striking this balance requires intentionality, prioritizing quality time, and fostering open communication within the family.

2.3.1 Quality Time

In our fast-paced world, modeling out intentional moments for your family is crucial. Jesus' invitation in Matthew 19:14 "Let the little children come to me," serves as a powerful reminder of the importance of prioritizing your children and spending meaningful time with them.

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Quality time isn't just about physical presence; it's about active engagement—playing, listening, and sharing in your children's lives. For example, setting aside one evening each week for a family meal or activity, free from distractions like phones or work, can significantly strengthen your bond. These moments create memories, foster a sense of belonging, and reassure your children that they are valued and loved.

2.3.2 Quick to listen but slow to speak

James 1:19 says: "Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak." Create a space where your children feel safe to express their thoughts, fears, and joys without fear of judgment. Active listening is key—putting aside distractions to truly hear what your child is saying builds their confidence and strengthens your relationship. For example, asking open-ended questions like, "What was the best part of your day?" encourages your children to share more and shows them that their feelings matter. This practice not only helps you stay connected to their inner world but also equips them with the confidence to approach you during challenging times.

2.3.3 Balancing Work Commitments

Balancing work commitments with family life requires clear boundaries. Establishing a work schedule that allows for uninterrupted family time demonstrates your priorities to your children and spouse. The African proverb, "No matter how high the bird flies, it must come down to the tree to rest," reminds us of the importance of returning to what truly matters—family. Ensure that your work responsibilities don't overshadow the needs of your loved ones. For instance, turning off work notifications during meals or dedicating weekends to family activities helps reinforce the importance of your relationship over external pressures.

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Psychologists emphasize that children prosper when they feel emotionally connected to their parents. Dr. Sue Johnson, in *Hold Me Tight: Seven Conversations for a Lifetime of Love*, highlights that strong family bonds are built through consistent emotional availability and shared experiences⁶. When parents make family time a priority, it nurtures children's emotional well-being and builds resilience in the face of life's challenges.

Balancing work and family life is very important. This is not about perfection but about prioritizing what truly matters. By dedicating quality time, fostering open communication, and setting clear boundaries with work, parents create a supportive and loving environment for their children. This intentional approach strengthens family relationships and equips children with the emotional stability they need to navigate the complexities of life.

2.4. Teaching Values and Faith

- What core values do you want to pass on to your children, and how do you incorporate them into daily life?
- How are you involving your family in faith practices such as prayer, worship, or service to others?
- How do you encourage your children to ask questions and engage with their faith in meaningful ways?

Parenting is not limited to providing for your children's physical needs; it is a sacred calling to nurture their character and spirituality. By teaching core values and cultivating faith, you lay the foundation for a life rooted in integrity, compassion, and purpose. This intentional effort

⁶ Sue Johnson, *Hold Me Tight: Seven Conversations for a Lifetime of Love* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2008), **95–98**.

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helps your children navigate the complexities of the modern world with moral clarity and spiritual resilience.

2.4.1. Teaching Core Values

Deuteronomy 6:7 instructs, “Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road.” This verse highlights the importance of weaving lessons about values into everyday life. Discuss principles such as honesty, respect, kindness, and responsibility with your children, using teachable moments to help them internalize these values. For example, a family discussion about honesty after an incident at school can reinforce its importance and demonstrate that truthfulness is valued in your home. The African proverb, “A child is what you put into him,” serves as a reminder that the lessons parents teach early in life shape a child’s character for years to come.

2.4.2. Faith Formation

Faith is a cornerstone of holistic parenting, offering children a spiritual anchor and moral compass. Joshua 24:15 declares, “As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.” Integrating faith into daily family life creates a sense of purpose and belonging. Simple practices such as praying before meals, reading scripture together, or attending religious services as a family foster a strong spiritual connection. Faith also provides comfort and guidance during life’s challenges, teaching children to rely on God and trust in His plan. For example, encouraging your child to pray for courage before a big test or event can instill confidence and a sense of divine support.

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2.4.3. Modeling Values and Faith

Children learn more from what they see than from what they are told. Modeling the values and faith you want to teach to your children is essential. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 11:1, “Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.” This biblical reference calls you to demonstrate honesty in your dealings, show kindness to others, and express gratitude openly. When children see these principles in action, they are more likely to emulate them. For instance, if parents volunteer together at a local shelter or donate to a cause, children learn the value of compassion and service through observation.

Dr. Gary Chapman emphasizes the importance of teaching children values in ways that resonate with their unique personalities and needs⁷. For instance, some children respond to words of affirmation, while others learn better through acts of service or quality time. Tailoring your approach to fit your child’s learning style makes the lessons more impactful and enduring.

Teaching values and faith in your children is a continuous process that requires intentionality, patience, and love. By teaching core principles, integrating faith into family life, and modeling these ideals in your daily actions, you equip your children with the tools they need to grow into compassionate, resilient, and spiritually grounded individuals. This sacred task, grounded in biblical teachings and reinforced through loving practice, ensures that your family reflects God’s light and love in the world.

⁷ Gary Chapman and Ross Campbell, *The 5 Love Languages of Children* (Chicago: Northfield Publishing, 2016), 35–39.

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2.5. Encouraging Independence and Resilience

- How do you allow your children to make age-appropriate decisions and learn from their mistakes?
- How are you teaching your children to persevere through challenges and setbacks?
- What strategies can you use to build your child's confidence and problem-solving skills?

Parenting involves more than providing guidance—it requires preparing children to navigate life's challenges with confidence and strength. Teaching independence and resilience equips children to make decisions, face setbacks, and grow into capable, self-reliant individuals who can thrive in an unpredictable world.

2.5.1 Promoting Independence

Allowing children to make age-appropriate decisions and learn from their mistakes is essential for their development. Proverbs 22:3 says, “The prudent see danger and take refuge.” This wisdom encourages teaching children to recognize consequences and take responsibility for their choices. For instance, involving a child in simple decisions, such as managing their allowance or choosing extracurricular activities, fosters critical thinking and accountability. The African proverb, “The child who has not traveled thinks only his mother cooks well,” underscores the importance of exposing children to experiences that broaden their perspective and encourage independence.

Building independence also means giving children the space to try, fail, and try again. A parent's role is to provide guidance while allowing children to learn from their actions. For example, teaching a child how to prepare a meal or manage a small project helps them

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develop problem-solving skills and a sense of achievement. This process, while sometimes disordered, lays the foundation for a confident, self-sufficient adult.

2.5.2. Building Resilience

Resilience—the ability to bounce back from setbacks—is a crucial life skill. Romans 5:3-4 teaches, “Suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope.” This passage reminds parents that challenges are not to be avoided but embraced as opportunities for growth. Helping children manage disappointment or failure with grace prepares them to handle adversity with courage and optimism. For instance, if a child loses a competition or performs poorly on an exam, encourage them to reflect on the experience, identify areas for improvement, and try again with a positive attitude.

Resilience is built through consistent support and encouragement. Parents can model this by sharing their own stories of overcoming obstacles, demonstrating that failure is not the end but a step toward growth. The African saying, “Smooth seas do not make skillful sailors,” reinforces the idea that life’s difficulties shape stronger individuals. Teaching children to view challenges as opportunities helps them develop perseverance and emotional strength.

2.5.3. Creating a Supportive Environment

While encouraging independence and resilience, it is crucial to provide a nurturing environment where children feel secure and supported. Children are more likely to take risks and learn from mistakes when they know their parents are there to guide and encourage them. Dr. Sue Johnson, in *Hold Me Tight*, emphasizes that emotional security within the family creates a foundation for resilience. When children feel

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valued and understood, they are more confident in facing life's challenges.⁸

In short, fostering independence and resilience is about finding the balance between guidance and freedom. By allowing children to make decisions, encouraging them to persevere through setbacks, and providing a supportive environment, parents equip their children with the tools they need to thrive. Grounded in biblical wisdom, cultural insights, and practical strategies, these lessons prepare children to approach life with strength, hope, and a deep sense of self-reliance.

2.6. Supporting Your Spouse

- How do you and your spouse support each other in your parenting roles?
- What steps can you take to ensure you present a united front when making decisions about your children?
- How do you prioritize your marriage while navigating the responsibilities of parenthood?

Parenting is a sacred and shared responsibility that flourishes on teamwork and mutual support. When spouses work together in harmony, they create a stable and loving environment for their children. Supporting your spouse in the parenting journey not only strengthens your marriage but also sets a powerful example of unity and love for your family.

2.6.1. Teamwork

Parenting is most effective when both partners contribute their unique strengths and perspectives. Ecclesiastes 4:9-10 reminds us, “Two

⁸ Sue Johnson, *Hold Me Tight: Seven Conversations for a Lifetime of Love* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2008), 140–144.

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are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor. If either of them falls down, one can help the other up.” This verse highlights the importance of collaboration in navigating the challenges of raising children. Teamwork involves sharing responsibilities, from decision-making to daily tasks, ensuring that neither parent feels overwhelmed. For instance, while one parent assists with homework, the other can handle meal preparation. This division of labor demonstrates to children the power of cooperation and mutual respect.

Teamwork also includes being united in discipline and guidance. Children are quick to notice inconsistencies between their parents, which can lead to confusion or manipulation. By presenting a united front, parents provide clear and consistent boundaries that foster a sense of security for their children. The African proverb, “Sticks in a bundle are unbreakable,” emphasizes that unity is strength—a lesson that applies equally to parenting partnerships.

2.6.2. Strengthening Your Marriage

A strong and loving marriage is the foundation of effective parenting. Ephesians 5:25 advises, “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church.” This verse underlines the sacrificial and selfless love that should characterize a marital relationship. When parents prioritize their relationship, they model healthy love, respect, and communication for their children. A secure and harmonious marriage provides children with emotional stability, helping them thrive in a nurturing environment.

Strengthening your marriage involves making time for each other amidst the busyness of parenting. Regular date nights, shared hobbies, or even simple acts of kindness can help maintain the connection between spouses. When children see their parents supporting and cherishing one another, they learn the importance of healthy

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relationships and mutual care. For example, openly expressing gratitude for your spouse's contributions to the family reinforces love and respect within the household.

Psychologists emphasize that children's emotional well-being is closely tied to the strength of their parents' relationship. Dr. Gary Chapman, in *The 5 Love Languages*, notes that when parents nurture their marriage, they create a flow effect that benefits the entire family⁹. By fostering a loving and supportive relationship, spouses provide their children with a blueprint for navigating relationships in their own lives.

In conclusion, supporting your spouse in parenting is about more than sharing responsibilities; it is about fostering unity, love, and mutual respect within the family. Through teamwork, a strong marriage, and intentional effort, parents can create a stable and nurturing environment where their children feel safe and cherished. Grounded in biblical principles, cultural wisdom, and psychological insights, this shared effort strengthens the family bond and reflects God's design for love and partnership.

⁹ Gary Chapman and Ross Campbell, *The 5 Love Languages of Children* (Chicago: Northfield Publishing, 2016), 112–115.

CHAPTER 3: SHARING RESPONSIBILITIES IN HOUSEHOLD CHORES

In many cultures, household chores have traditionally been viewed as a woman's responsibility, while men were expected to focus on external work. This cultural norm has created a perception among some men that participating in housework is a sign of domination or submission, rather than an act of partnership. This chapter explores the origins of this mindset, how it manifests in various cultural contexts (with specific references to Kenyan traditions), and provides insights from the Bible, Church teachings, and modern psychology on creating a more balanced approach to household responsibilities.



3.1. Historical and cultural perspectives on housework in Kenya

- How have traditional cultural perspectives influenced your view of gender roles in household chores?

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- Are there specific cultural practices or beliefs in your family that create challenges or opportunities for sharing responsibilities?
- How can you balance respecting cultural traditions while fostering a more collaborative approach to housework?

In Kenya, perceptions of household roles vary across different tribes, reflecting deeply embedded cultural values. For example, in many Kikuyu households, men traditionally held the responsibility for land cultivation and cattle tending, while women managed the household and cared for children. This division often reinforced the idea that house chores were outside the masculine role. Similarly, in the Maasai culture, men traditionally tended to cattle and participated in tribal decision-making, while women took on child-rearing and domestic tasks. Such roles have been essential for these communities' social structures and survival.

These traditional divisions of household roles have shaped each community's approach to family life, establishing structures that were essential for their survival and social cohesion. However, as societal dynamics evolve, so do the perceptions of these roles. In the following section, we will examine specific cultural practices within various Kenyan communities in greater detail, exploring how these traditions have influenced, and continue to influence, the way household responsibilities are shared today.

3.1.1 Gender Roles in Kikuyu Culture: Tradition and Evolution

In Kikuyu culture, traditional gender roles were clearly defined, with men and women taking on distinct responsibilities essential to family and community life. Men were tasked with agricultural labor, including land cultivation and cattle tending, which were considered to

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require physical strength and endurance. This work was not only practical but also symbolic, representing the masculine role of provider and protector. Beyond physical labor, men handled matters related to security, governance, and decision-making within the clan. These responsibilities were deeply ingrained and reinforced by cultural beliefs that upheld masculinity as a vital force for family protection.

For Kikuyu women, responsibilities centered around the home and family. Their roles included cooking, cleaning, laundry, childcare, and other domestic duties. Women were seen as the heart of the household, with a focus on nurturing and managing the home. This separation of roles was strict, and men were discouraged—even socially prohibited—from engaging in tasks traditionally assigned to women, such as cooking, washing dishes, or laundry. It was considered almost taboo for a Kikuyu man to be seen performing these tasks, as such actions contradicted cultural expectations of his role.

The Kikuyu have proverbs that reflect and reinforce these traditional gender roles. One proverb, “Muthuri ta rūhiũ rwa nyumba” (A man is the pillar of the house), emphasizes the expectation that men should be strong, dependable providers and protectors, underscoring their foundational role in family stability. Another saying, “Mũndũ mũka nĩ ndirĩ ya gatangathi” (The woman is the fire of the home), highlights women’s responsibility for nurturing and managing the household¹⁰. These proverbs illustrate how gender roles were deeply woven into Kikuyu cultural norms, reflecting a worldview in which men and women’s roles were distinct yet complementary.

A similar understanding of the separation of roles is highlighted in the essay “The Politics of Gender Roles: A Comparative Analysis of

¹⁰ Edouard Thomas, The Qualities of Kikuyu Women in Marriage (article posted on 04/02/2024)

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Female Husbands, Male Daughters, and Sworn Virgins among the Igbo of West Africa, the Nandi and Kikuyu of East Africa, and the Gheg of North Albania” by Fiosa Begai Mjeshtri. The author explains that in Kikuyu marriages, men were responsible for the economic subsistence of the family, while women focused on domestic labor¹¹. The essay portrays men as the head of the household, representing the family socially and politically, while women served as the heart of the family, ensuring its nurturing and sustenance.

From these cultural insights, it is clear that historically, the idea of sharing household tasks was foreign in Kikuyu society. Gender roles were complementary but rigidly separate, with little to no overlap. These distinctions were seen as fundamental to maintaining order and stability within the family and clan. Traditional Kikuyu values emphasized that the family unit was strongest when men and women fulfilled their specific roles, each contributing uniquely to the family’s welfare and stability.

Today, however, modern influences are reshaping these traditional roles, particularly in urban areas where both men and women often work outside the home and share household responsibilities more equitably. This shift represents a blend of traditional Kikuyu values with evolving attitudes toward gender equality and shared responsibilities. Despite these changes, cultural perspectives persist, with some men still resisting household tasks due to fears of appearing “dominated” or “unmanly.” Challenging these ingrained norms requires a re-examination of cultural assumptions and a realization that shared

¹¹ Fiosa Begai Mjeshtri, "The Politics of Gender Roles: A Comparative Analysis of Female Husbands, Male Daughters, and Sworn Virgins among the Igbo of West Africa, the Nandi and Kikuyu of East Africa, and the Gheg of North Albania," in *African Culture and Global Politics*, ed. Toyin Falola and Danielle Sanchez (New York: Routledge, 2014), 400.

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responsibilities do not diminish masculinity but instead promote a healthy and balanced partnership in marriage.

3.1.2 Gender Roles in Kamba Culture: Tradition and Evolution

In Kamba culture, traditional gender roles were distinctly defined, with men and women taking on separate responsibilities in both domestic and communal life. Household chores were considered primarily the domain of women, with specific activities assigned based on gender. Men, after initiation through circumcision, typically refrained from entering the kitchen. Instead, their contribution to food preparation was limited to tasks requiring physical strength, such as slaughtering goats, sheep, or cows and grilling selected pieces of meat. The detailed cooking, however, was exclusively the wife's responsibility.

Cleaning and general household maintenance were also regarded as the wife's domain. While men prepared the land for cultivation, women were responsible for fetching water and cleaning the home, often with the assistance of their daughters. Laundry, dishwashing, and tidying up after meals were similarly considered women's work, with men rarely, if ever, participating in these tasks. Grocery shopping, however, was more nuanced. While women generally handled this responsibility, men occasionally brought home supplies when traveling long distances or visiting markets far from the homestead.

Proverbs in Kamba culture reinforce these traditional roles. For example, the saying, “Mwana muka nĩwe wĩtanga yĩũ ya ngũlu” (The wife is the one who handles the smoke of the home), reflects the expectation that women were the primary caretakers of the household. This division of labor was rooted in practicality, ensuring that family and societal roles were fulfilled efficiently.

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The division of labor in Kamba tradition is further captured in the statement, “Men are expected to provide for their families, while women are charged with the responsibility of tilling the land for food.”¹² This statement highlights a complementary system where both genders contribute to the family’s welfare in distinct ways. Men were considered the primary providers, responsible for acquiring resources such as money or livestock to sustain the family. Their activities included trading, herding, and other external responsibilities to ensure economic stability. This role as providers was deeply tied to their status as heads of households, reinforcing their duty to secure the family’s survival.

On the other hand, women were tasked with the labor-intensive work of tilling the land, planting, and harvesting crops to ensure there was food for the family. While men provided the tools, livestock, or resources to acquire seeds, women turned these means into sustenance. This dynamic reflects the communal ethos of African traditions, where roles were interdependent rather than hierarchical. Women’s agricultural work was highly valued, not just as physical labor but as an essential contribution to household survival. The balance between men’s external provision and women’s internal cultivation ensured the family’s stability and continuity.

With the influence of Westernization, education, and urbanization, these traditional roles have evolved significantly. Today, there is greater flexibility in household responsibilities, with men increasingly participating in tasks traditionally assigned to women. Cooking, cleaning, and even laundry are no longer considered taboo for Kamba men, particularly in urban settings. This shift reflects broader changes in cultural attitudes and perceptions of gender equality, driven by modernization. For example, the gradual acceptance of women

¹² Joseph Muya Mani, cultural patterns from the kamba culture, (a paper published by the I.S.I.U, pp 15.)

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wearing trousers, once seen as a cultural taboo in the 1980s and 1990s, symbolizes the dynamic nature of Kamba traditions and the evolving understanding of shared responsibilities within households.

This transformation represents a blend of traditional values with contemporary practices, demonstrating that cultural norms are not static but adapt to meet the changing needs of society. Through these changes, Kamba households are finding new ways to balance tradition and progress, fostering stronger partnerships and mutual respect between men and women.

3.1.3 Gender Roles in Kisii Culture: Tradition and Transformation

In Kisii (Gusii) culture, household chores and labor were traditionally divided along gender lines, with women and men taking on roles that reflected their societal responsibilities and the needs of their community. Women were primarily responsible for domestic tasks and food cultivation. This included activities such as cooking, brewing traditional beverages, fetching water and firewood, cleaning the house, and processing food. Their role was essential to the daily sustenance and smooth functioning of the household, making them the cornerstone of the family's survival.

Men, on the other hand, focused on activities that required physical strength and protection. Their responsibilities included building houses and fences, clearing new fields, herding cattle, and, in precolonial times, waging war to protect their families and communities. Although women carried the primary burden of cultivation, men actively participated, particularly in the initial stages, such as clearing fields and preparing land for planting. This cooperative effort underscored the complementary nature of gender roles in Kisii society, where both men

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and women contributed to the family's well-being within their distinct spheres.

Proverbs in Kisii culture often reflect these traditional roles. For example, the saying, "Omonto nomokongi bw'obogima" (A person is the pillar of life), emphasizes the value of each individual's contribution to the family's survival. This can be interpreted to mean that while men and women had different roles, both were indispensable to the community's stability and prosperity. Similarly, "Nyomba y'ekeng'eni neyoncho" (A house without a woman is empty), highlights the centrality of women in creating a functional and nurturing home.

In *Bridewealth, Women, and Land: Social Change among the Gusii of Kenya*, N. Thomas Hakansson examines the impact of colonial policies on gender roles and labor division among the Gusii people. He discusses how the introduction of cash crops and wage labor led men to withdraw from traditional agricultural activities, focusing instead on cash crop cultivation or employment in colonial labor systems. Consequently, women were left to manage both subsistence farming and the cultivation of men's cash crops, in addition to their traditional domestic responsibilities. This analysis is detailed in Chapter 3, "Bridewealth and Marriage," where Hakansson explores the economic transformations and their effects on gender dynamics within Gusii society. This shift created a heavier workload for women, as their labor expanded to encompass a broader range of tasks without corresponding relief from other duties.

Hakansson, in highlights how these changes placed disproportionate burdens on Gusii women. While men benefited economically from cash crop production and wage labor, women's work remained undervalued and unrecognized, perpetuating gender

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inequalities¹³. This evolving division of labor illustrates how external influences, such as colonialism, disrupted the traditional balance of gender roles within Kisii culture.

Today, modern influences and education are gradually reshaping these dynamics. In urban and more progressive rural households, men are increasingly participating in tasks traditionally reserved for women, such as cooking and cleaning. This shift reflects broader societal changes and evolving attitudes toward gender equality. However, challenges remain, particularly in rural areas where traditional norms still dominate, and women continue to bear the majority of household and agricultural responsibilities.

The Kisii experience offers valuable insights into the resilience and adaptability of cultural practices in the face of external pressures and social change. By blending traditional values with modern perspectives on gender equality, Kisii families can move toward a more balanced and equitable division of labor, fostering stronger partnerships and healthier households.

3.1.4 Gender Roles in Luo Culture: Tradition and Transformation

In Luo culture, traditional gender roles were distinctly defined to ensure the smooth functioning of both household and community life. According to the folktale of Agola, men and women held different yet complementary roles in society. Women were primarily responsible for maintaining the homestead, which included cooking, cleaning, and managing the household's daily needs. On the other hand, men were

¹³ Thomas Hakansson, *Bridewealth, Women, and Land: Social Change among the Gusii of Kenya* (Uppsala: Uppsala University, 1988), 237.

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tasked with farming, protecting the family, and taking care of livestock.¹⁴ These roles were structured to highlight the interdependence of men and women, with each gender contributing uniquely to the welfare of the family and the community.

Men were primarily tasked with duties that required physical strength and protection. Their roles included safeguarding the home from external threats, overseeing cattle during grazing, and participating in hunting and gathering. These responsibilities demonstrated the physical prowess and strategic thinking required of Luo men to ensure the safety and survival of their households. This expectation of strength and courage extended beyond day-to-day tasks and was embedded in social customs such as Yuecho (abduction) and Amen (wrestling), which were culturally significant practices tied to marriage and courtship.

Yuecho¹⁵, or abduction, was a traditional practice where men would forcefully carry away a potential bride to the husband's home. This was not a random act but a carefully planned process. Once a man identified a woman he intended to marry, he would observe her routines, such as where she fetched water or firewood. On the chosen day, the man, with the assistance of other men, would abduct her. While the woman might cry out during the act, passers-by typically refrained from intervening, as the process was culturally recognized and understood within the Luo community.

¹⁴ "An Ethnography of Luo Marriage Based on a Traditional Folktale from Alego Central," *Kenya Connection*, accessed November 13, 2024, <https://kenyaconnection.org/luo-marriage/>.

¹⁵ George Otieno Ochola, "Traditional Luo Marriage Process," updated January 20, 2023, accessed November 13, 2024, <https://lughayangu.com/post/traditional-luo-marriage-process>.

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Closely related to this was Amen, or wrestling, which further emphasized the role of physical strength in courtship and marriage. Before a man could take a woman as his wife, he might have to wrestle her brothers or even the woman herself. This custom symbolized the man's ability to protect and provide for his future wife. If he failed to overpower the woman or her brothers, he was deemed unfit to marry her, as it signified a lack of the strength and resilience required to care for a family.

These practices, though immersed in tradition, reinforced the cultural expectation that men embody strength and protection, qualities that were seen as integral to their roles within the household and society. They also highlight the deeply physical and communal nature of Luo courtship, where the community validated and supported these customs, ensuring that strength and capability were central to marriage and family life.

Additionally, men were the architects of family dwellings, taking the lead in constructing the structural framework of houses, particularly the roofing. Their responsibilities extended to the marketplace, where they engaged in trading large livestock, such as cows and goats. This role in livestock trade underscored their position as providers, ensuring the economic stability of the household. Men's engagement in these activities was a reflection of their role as defenders and breadwinners within the family structure.

Women, on the other hand, were the primary managers of domestic duties. Their responsibilities included food preparation, maintaining cleanliness by sweeping the compound, cleaning the chicken pen, and milking. Women also played a pivotal role in house construction by applying and smearing mud on the walls to complete the structures initiated by men. In the marketplace, women were actively involved in trading vegetables, grains, and smaller items within the local

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community. This division of labor highlighted women's central role in ensuring the daily sustenance and functionality of the household.

The roles of men and women were deeply ingrained in Luo society and reinforced through proverbs. For example, the saying “Dhako en ng'ato ma nyalo keto ot” (A woman is someone who can build a home) underscores the indispensable role of women in establishing and maintaining the household. Another proverb, “Wuod dhako nyalo bedo wuon pacho” (A woman's son can become the owner of the homestead), highlights the significance of women's contributions to family continuity and stability. These proverbs reflect the Luo belief in the complementary nature of gender roles, where both men and women were seen as crucial to the survival and prosperity of the family unit.

Over time, modernization, education, and economic changes have significantly influenced these traditional roles. The introduction of formal education and employment opportunities has led to shifts in household dynamics, with men increasingly participating in domestic tasks traditionally reserved for women. Similarly, women have taken on roles that were once predominantly male, such as engaging in formal employment or managing livestock businesses. This evolution reflects a broader trend toward gender equality and shared responsibilities within Luo households, especially in urban areas.

3.1.5 Gender Roles in Kalenjin Culture: Tradition and Evolution

In Kalenjin culture, traditional gender roles were distinctly defined, reflecting the complementary responsibilities of men and women within the household and community. These roles were deeply rooted in cultural beliefs and practices. While women focused on managing domestic tasks, men undertook activities outside the home. In the early stages of childhood, the mother served as the first teacher for

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both boys and girls, imparting foundational knowledge and skills. However, as children grew older, boys were placed under the tutelage of their father, while girls continued learning home-making skills from their mother¹⁶.

Fathers played a crucial role in teaching boys the duties and responsibilities associated with manhood. Much of this learning happened through observation and active participation in daily tasks. Boys were taught animal husbandry, hunting, and fighting tactics. They learned to count livestock, identify them by features such as clan tattoos and ear marks, and recognize the diverse flora and fauna of their environment. Meanwhile, girls were trained in home management, ensuring they were equipped with the skills to run a household. This stage of education also emphasized proper communication, communal values, and age-appropriate social skills.

In addition to the parental education, an important aspect of learning occurred during initiation rites, which were often conducted by the Ogiek community¹⁷. These rites marked a significant transition into adulthood and were accompanied by rigorous training in cultural, moral, and practical knowledge. Songs, proverbs, legends, and riddles were integral to this process, serving as tools for imparting wisdom and preserving cultural heritage. This comprehensive system of education ensured that boys and girls were well-prepared to fulfill their roles within the Kalenjin community, maintaining the balance and cohesion that defined their society.

¹⁶ Kiplagat Chelelgo, "Pre-Colonial Political Organization of the Kalenjin of Kenya: An Overview," *International Journal of Innovative Research and Development* 5, no. 6 (2016), 9.

¹⁷ Thomas Kipkorir Ronoh, "Contextualizing Historical and Socio-Anthropological Literature on Indigenous Education in Enhancing Environmental Conservation: Case of Ogiek of Mau Forest, Kenya," *European Journal of Alternative Education Studies* 1, no. 1 (2016): 26.

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Building on the structured education and clear division of responsibilities in Kalenjin culture, traditional household tasks were also distinctly divided between men and women, reflecting societal expectations. Cooking was traditionally viewed as a woman's responsibility, particularly within the household. It was considered inappropriate and even taboo for men to engage in cooking. Instead, men focused on activities outside the home, such as herding, farming, earning money for the family, and ensuring security. This division of labor reinforced the societal expectation that men serve as providers and protectors, while women manage the daily sustenance and nurturing of the household.

Cleaning and maintaining the home were similarly seen as a woman's role. In rural and traditional settings, it was uncommon and culturally frowned upon for men to perform cleaning duties. Their primary contribution was providing for the family through work outside the home. This belief was captured in the Kalenjin proverb, "Lakwo lagok cheb tamuk" (Children are raised by the fire), which highlights the cultural importance of women's central role in maintaining the home and nurturing the family.

The division of labor also extended to tasks such as grocery shopping. Men were rarely involved in buying household supplies, as their role as providers emphasized earning resources to support the family. Women, on the other hand, managed the practical aspects of provisioning, ensuring the household ran smoothly. Men's responsibilities outside the home underscored their role as the family's financial and protective backbone, while women maintained the functionality of the household through their domestic tasks. Laundry and dishwashing similarly fell under women's responsibilities, with these roles further reinforcing the perception that such tasks were inherently feminine and unsuitable for men.

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Kalenjin proverbs often reflect and reinforce this division of labor, emphasizing the complementary but distinct roles of men and women. For example, "Kong'o kwonyi koeng'et" (The kitchen belongs to the woman) underscores the belief that household maintenance is the domain of women. Conversely, "Boiyot choto kito koboen" (A man's strength is his cattle) reflects the expectation that men focus on providing and protecting, particularly through their economic and herding activities.

However, these traditional roles have gradually evolved with the influence of modernization, education, and urbanization. In contemporary Kalenjin families, particularly in urban areas, men are increasingly participating in tasks traditionally reserved for women, such as cooking, cleaning, and grocery shopping. This shift reflects broader societal changes toward gender equality and shared responsibilities within households. Today, Kalenjin families are navigating a balance between preserving traditional values and embracing modern expectations, fostering a more collaborative approach to household roles.

3.2. Biblical Insights on Partnership in Marriage

- How does the biblical call to mutual submission and service influence the way you share responsibilities in your marriage?
- How can viewing household chores as an act of service to your spouse reflect Christ's love in your marriage?
- Are there ways in which biblical principles can challenge or support your current division of household responsibilities?

The Bible offers a model for partnership that transcends traditional gender roles, promoting mutual respect and cooperation. In Genesis 2:18, God says, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him." Here, "helper" is not meant to imply subservience but rather partnership and support. Furthermore, in Ephesians 5:21, Paul instructs couples to "submit to one another out of

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reverence for Christ,” encouraging a mutual submission that extends to all aspects of life, including household duties. This submission, grounded in love and respect, suggests that marriage should not adhere to rigid roles but should involve shared responsibility and a spirit of cooperation.

Pope Francis echoes this sentiment in *Amoris Laetitia*, where he stresses that “mutual concern and care, loving respect and deeply meaningful communication” are very important in a marriage.¹⁸ He urges husbands and wives to cultivate a partnership where each supports the other, challenging the idea that household chores are strictly a woman’s domain. “...There can be a certain flexibility of roles and responsibilities, depending on the concrete circumstances of each particular family. But the clear and well-defined presence of both figures, female and male, creates the environment best suited to the growth of the child...”¹⁹ By sharing these responsibilities, couples reflect the love and humility that are central to Christian marriage.

3.3. Psychological Perspectives on Shared Responsibility

- How does sharing household chores impact your emotional connection and satisfaction in your marriage?
- Have you noticed how stress from an unequal division of labor affects your relationship? How can this be addressed?
- What small changes can you make to ensure both partners feel supported and valued in managing household tasks?

Psychologists have found that sharing household responsibilities fosters stronger, more supportive relationships. Research suggests that

¹⁸ Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia: The Joy of Love* (Vatican City: Vatican Press, 2016), paragraph 183.

¹⁹ Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia: The Joy of Love* (Vatican City: Vatican Press, 2016), paragraph 175.

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when men actively participate in household chores, marital satisfaction often increases, as both partners feel valued and supported. Renowned psychologist John Gottman found that men who help with chores strengthen their relationship with their wives and set a positive example for their children, modeling respect and equality. In his book, Gottman discusses how shared responsibilities and helping with household tasks contribute to stronger marital satisfaction and can have a positive impact on children. Specifically, he notes that when men are involved in chores and parenting, it fosters a deeper sense of partnership and models respect and equality within the family.²⁰ This renowned psychologist did find that the happiest, most stable marriages in the long run were those where the husband treated his wife with respect and did not resist power sharing and decision making with her²¹.

This shared responsibility reduces stress, increases relationship satisfaction, and promotes a healthier as well as a more balanced family environment. Husbands should therefore understand that sharing chores does not undermine masculinity; rather, it demonstrates a man's commitment to the family and respect for his spouse. When men willingly engage in household tasks, they create an environment of mutual support, which enhances emotional connection and deepens marital bonds.

3.4. Practical ways to encourage Men's participation in housework

- What practical steps can you take to involve both partners equally in household tasks?
- How can you create a system that ensures responsibilities are divided fairly and effectively?

²⁰John Gottman and Nan Silver, *The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work* (New York: Crown Publishers, Three Rivers Press, 1999), p. 20-40.

²¹ Ibid, p. 100-101.

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- Are there conversations you need to have with your spouse to address stereotypes or assumptions about who should do what?

Encouraging men to participate in household chores requires a gradual shift in mindset, one that appreciates partnership over traditional role divisions. Here are some practical ways to make this transition smoother:

1. **Focus on Communication:** Couples should discuss their expectations and concerns openly, aligning their household responsibilities with each other's strengths and schedules.
2. **Avoid Criticism:** Instead of pointing out flaws, appreciate efforts and provide gentle guidance when needed. This fosters a positive attitude toward participation.
3. **Divide Chores Based on Preference:** Some men may be more inclined to help with specific tasks (e.g., cooking, cleaning, or repairs). Dividing chores based on interest can make the process enjoyable and collaborative.
4. **Set an Example for Children:** When fathers engage in household tasks, they model values of respect and partnership for their children, teaching them that household work is not gender-specific.

By normalizing shared responsibilities, couples create a balanced environment that benefits the entire family, challenging traditional norms while building a supportive and respectful home.

3.5. Reframing Household Work as an Act of Love

- How can viewing household chores as an act of love and care transform the way you approach them?

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- What daily practices can you implement to show appreciation for each other's contributions at home?
- How does reframing chores as opportunities to serve one another deepen your bond as a couple?

Viewing household chores as a way to serve and support each other can transform attitudes toward these tasks. Colossians 3:23 encourages believers to “work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men,” suggesting that even ordinary tasks can be acts of love and devotion. When men view housework as an extension of their commitment to their family, they may find more joy and purpose in contributing to household needs.

This shift in perspective aligns with African wisdom that encourages working together in unity. As the Kenyan proverb says, “Sticks in a bundle are unbreakable.” By joining efforts, couples strengthen their family foundation, demonstrating that household chores are not about dominance or submission but about love, partnership, and shared responsibility.

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CHAPTER 4: NAVIGATING DISAPPOINTMENTS FROM CHILDREN WHEN EXPECTATIONS ARE SHATTERED

Family harmony can be profoundly shaken when children face significant disappointments, such as unexpected pregnancies or personal failures. These challenges often elicit strong emotional reactions from parents, leading to feelings of anger, disappointment, and frustration. However, it's crucial to remember that these situations can serve as opportunities for growth and healing within the family. Restoring harmony requires open communication, empathy, and a commitment to support one another through difficult times. By fostering a compassionate environment, families can navigate these crises together, ultimately strengthening their bonds. This journey, while challenging, can lead to deeper understanding and unity among family members.



4.1. Learning from James and Mary's family experience

- How do James and Mary's story reflect challenges that you might face in your family?
- What lessons can you learn from their journey about handling disappointment with grace and understanding?

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- How can the way you respond to your children's challenges shape the overall harmony of your family?

In the quiet of their living room, the tension was palpable in the Thompson household. James, the father, sat with his head in his hands, grappling with a torrent of disappointment. His daughter, Sarah, had just announced her unexpected pregnancy, and he felt the weight of failure pressing down on him. "I must have done something wrong," he muttered, replaying moments from her childhood in his mind, each choice now tinged with regret. Meanwhile, Mary, his wife, looked on with a heavy heart. As a devoted Christian family, they had always held strong values, but now those beliefs felt challenged.

"James, we need to talk about this," Mary said gently, trying to bridge the growing chasm between them. "Sarah needs us now more than ever. We can't turn our backs on her." But her words fell on deaf ears; James was consumed by his thoughts, unwilling to acknowledge the gravity of the situation. "What if she aborts the baby or worse—feels so rejected that she considers suicide?" Mary's voice trembled as she spoke, fearing the consequences of their inaction. "Mistakes can be corrected. Change is possible." Yet every conversation ended in silence, the gulf between their feelings widening.

Feeling torn and helpless, Mary considered leaving their home, but her faith held her back. Instead, she chose to stay by Sarah's side while also praying for healing within their family. "I can't watch our daughter suffer, and I won't abandon her in this time of need," she told James, her voice steady yet filled with sorrow. Although James remained distant, Mary did not walk away. Instead, she created a supportive environment for Sarah within their home, showing her daughter the love and care she needed during her pregnancy. Meanwhile, Mary continued to engage James in gentle conversation, hoping that, with time, he would reflect on his actions and emotions. Through this difficult season, Mary

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clung to the hope that their strong Christian faith could mend the family's wounds, guiding them all toward reconciliation and forgiveness without tearing the family apart.

4.2. Bridging Cultures: Finding Strength in Diversity for Family Unity.

- How do cultural differences within your family influence your parenting and decision-making?
- What steps can you take to honor and integrate cultural values while prioritizing family unity?
- Are there specific cultural traditions or beliefs that could serve as sources of strength and understanding during family crises?

James and Mary's cultural differences significantly influenced their approach to handling their daughter's unexpected pregnancy. James, coming from a background that emphasizes personal responsibility and self-reliance, initially reacted with disappointment and a sense of failure. He struggled to understand his daughter's situation and felt overwhelmed by the need to maintain his family's honor. In contrast, Mary's culture emphasized communal support and compassion, leading her to focus on nurturing their daughter during this challenging time.

This divergence in perspectives ultimately became a strength. Mary advocated for a compassionate approach, urging James to consider their daughter's emotional well-being. She emphasized the importance of showing unconditional love and support, mirroring values from her culture that prioritize family unity during crises. Meanwhile, James learned to channel his feelings of disappointment into a constructive dialogue, recognizing that his role as a father included guiding and supporting their daughter rather than solely condemning her actions.

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Together, they crafted a response that integrated both cultural influences: James's focus on responsibility and Mary's emphasis on compassion. This balanced approach not only fostered healing within their family but also created a supportive environment for their daughter. By recognizing the strengths in their cultural differences, James and Mary were able to unite in their parenting, demonstrating that understanding and embracing diverse backgrounds can lead to more effective problem-solving in family crises.

4.3. Handling Family Crisis with Honest Communication

- How do you ensure open and honest communication during a family crisis?
- Are there times when withholding your feelings has created misunderstandings or conflicts in your family?
- How can you create a safe space for family members to express their emotions without fear of judgment?

In times of family crisis, such as when a child faces a significant challenge, honest communication between parents becomes paramount. It is essential for both partners to openly express their feelings—be it disappointment, fear, or concern—without the fear of judgment. Charles Haddon Spurgeon (1834-1892) one of the most influential preachers of the last several centuries once said. “It is not how much we have, but how much we love that makes happiness.” This love is cultivated through transparent dialogue, allowing both parents to feel heard and understood. The Bible emphasizes this in Proverbs 15:22, which states, “Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers, they succeed.” By discussing their emotions and perspectives, parents can devise a collective approach to support their child while reinforcing their partnership.

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Moreover, sharing these feelings fosters a supportive environment that strengthens the marital bond. When couples acknowledge their vulnerabilities and express their individual worries, they create a safe space for collaboration and healing. Pope Francis highlights the importance of communication in family life, stating, “Dialogue is the best way to keep our love alive.” Open conversations can help dispel misunderstandings and create a deeper understanding of each partner’s emotional state. This alignment not only aids in addressing the immediate crisis but also fortifies the family's foundation for future challenges.

Finally, honest communication allows parents to set a united front when addressing their child's situation. When couples engage in sincere discussions, they can agree on how to approach the matter collectively, demonstrating love and support to their child. Ephesians 4:29 instructs us, “Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up.” By focusing on constructive communication, parents can model resilience and compassion for their children, illustrating that even in the face of disappointment, love and understanding prevail. This unity and clarity in communication will help navigate the complexities of family crises while nurturing both the child and the marital relationship.

4.4. Unified Support for the Children in a family

- How do you and your spouse show unified support for your children during their struggles?
- How can presenting a united front help children feel secure and valued in difficult times?
- What practical steps can you take to ensure that your children know they are loved, even when they fall short of expectations?

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Unified support approach communicates to the children that they are loved and supported, regardless of the circumstances. The Bible emphasizes the importance of unity in the family, as seen in Ecclesiastes 4:9-10, which states, “Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow.” By standing together, parents reinforce the idea that they are a team, capable of facing challenges collaboratively.

To effectively support their child, parents should engage in open discussions about their feelings while ensuring that these conversations happen out of earshot of the child. Strategies such as setting aside time for family meetings can help parents express their emotions and concerns. Pope Francis reminds us in *Amoris Laetitia* that “love is not merely a feeling; it is a decision, a commitment.” By choosing to show love and support for their children, even in moments of disappointment, parents can foster resilience and healing within the family.

African proverbs often compress deep wisdom about family and unity. For example, “If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.” This proverb highlights the importance of collaboration in overcoming challenges. When parents work together to support their children, they not only help the children navigate their difficulties but also strengthen their own relationship. By prioritizing a unified approach, families can emerge from crises more connected and resilient, demonstrating that love endures even in trying times.

4.5. Addressing Personal Feelings

- How do you handle your emotions, such as anger or disappointment, when children don’t meet your expectations?
- What strategies can you use to process these feelings constructively rather than allowing them to affect your relationship with your children?

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- How can self-reflection and prayer help you approach parenting challenges with greater empathy and patience?

Acknowledging personal feelings is always the first step toward healing. In Psalm 139:23-24, we read this: “Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my thoughts.” This verse reminds parents of the importance of introspection, urging them to confront their emotions honestly. Recognizing that feelings of guilt for perceived failures in parenting are common can help parents move toward constructive solutions.

Support from each other is crucial in processing these emotions. Parents should create a safe space for open dialogue where they can express their fears and frustrations without judgment. In *Amoris Laetitia*, Pope Francis stresses the importance of communication in families, stating that “open communication fosters intimacy and trust.” By discussing their emotions together, parents can validate each other’s feelings, which not only strengthens their relationship but also models healthy emotional processing for their children. This shared experience can alleviate feelings of isolation and despair, making it easier to navigate the challenges ahead.

Moreover, parents must strive to work through their feelings constructively. This may involve seeking guidance from trusted friends, counselors, or spiritual leaders who can provide support and perspective. Saint John Paul II highlighted the significance of community in healing, stating, “The family is the first school of human values.” By engaging with their community, parents can find additional support systems that foster healing. In this journey, they must remember that acknowledging their emotions and seeking help are signs of strength, ultimately leading to a more harmonious family dynamic as they navigate their children’s challenges together.

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4.6. The Transformative Power of Forgiveness and Healing

- How does forgiveness play a role in healing relationships within your family?
- Are there areas where you need to offer or seek forgiveness to restore harmony in your family?
- How can focusing on healing and growth help your family emerge stronger from times of disappointment?

Forgiveness is a powerful tool for healing, not only for the children involved but also for the parents themselves. The Bible teaches us about the importance of forgiveness in Ephesians 4:32, which encourages us to “be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.” This scripture highlights that forgiveness is essential for emotional and spiritual well-being. For parents grappling with disappointment, extending forgiveness to their children allows them to release feelings of resentment and anger, paving the way for healing and restoration in their relationship. It serves as a reminder that no one is perfect and that mistakes can lead to growth.

Equally important is the need for parents to forgive themselves. Feelings of guilt and regret are common among parents who feel they have failed their children. Saint Therese of Lisieux said, “It is not the greatness of our actions that matters, but the love with which we do them.”²² This sentiment emphasizes that while mistakes may have occurred, the intention behind parenting often stems from love. By embracing self-forgiveness, parents can recognize that they, too, deserve grace. This acknowledgment helps them to move forward with renewed purpose and compassion, facilitating a more profound understanding of their children's struggles.

²² “Doing small things with love” Popular quotation from St Therese of Lisieux

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Healing and reconciliation are achievable through the practice of forgiveness. Pope Francis, in *Amoris Laetitia*, stressing that the Christian ideal is not a life without trials but the ability to face them with love and hope says: “Both short-term and long-term marriage preparation should ensure that the couple do not view the wedding ceremony as the end of the road, but instead embark upon marriage as a lifelong calling based on a firm and realistic decision to face all trials and difficult moments together.”²³ This perspective fosters an environment where families can confront their challenges together, nurturing a sense of unity. As parents learn to forgive both their children and themselves, they create a space for open dialogue and emotional vulnerability. This transformative process not only strengthens family bonds but also instills a sense of resilience, reminding everyone that healing is possible and that love can overcome even the deepest disappointments.

²³ Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia: The Joy of Love* (Vatican City: Vatican Press, 2016), paragraph 211.

**CHAPTER 5: ETHICAL AND SPIRITUAL IMPLICATIONS OF
SURROGACY IN MARRIAGE**

Parenthood is a deeply cherished goal for many couples, but the journey toward it can sometimes present unexpected challenges. In this chapter, we develop a sensitive and complex issue: the decision to use a surrogate mother to conceive and bear a child. Specifically, we focus on situations where a wife chooses not to conceive due to career aspirations, and the couple agrees to pay another woman to carry and deliver their child. This exploration will address the ethical, spiritual, and relational consequences of surrogacy, all grounded in biblical principles, Church teachings, and practical wisdom.



5.1. Understanding the Sanctity of Marriage and Procreation

- How does the sanctity of marriage shape your perspective on parenthood and procreation?
- What does Genesis 1:28 teach you about the purpose of marriage and the blessing of children?
- How can reflecting on the sacred nature of procreation deepen your understanding of God's plan for your family?

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Marriage, as designed by God, is not just a contractual agreement but a sacred covenant that reflects His divine plan for love, unity, and procreation. Within this partnership, the blessing of children is both a gift and a responsibility, emphasizing the depth of the marital bond and the purpose of family in God's design. Understanding this sanctity helps couples manage challenging decisions, such as surrogacy, with wisdom and faith.

5.1.1. Biblical Foundation of Marriage

Marriage is a holy union ordained by God, where both partners join together in love and purpose. Genesis 1:28 says, "God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it.'" This command highlights that procreation is an integral part of marriage. The process of bearing and raising children is not simply biological but deeply spiritual, as it reflects God's creative power and His intention for human flourishing. In marriage, children are not seen as optional additions but as a natural and profound expression of the couple's love and unity, furthering their shared mission under God.

5.1.2. Children as a Gift from God

The Bible portrays children as a sacred inheritance, a reward entrusted to parents. Psalm 127:3 declares, "Children are a heritage from the Lord, offspring a reward from him." This perspective transforms the act of parenting into a divine calling, where children are not possessions but blessings that require stewardship. The decision to pursue surrogacy, while complex, challenges couples to reflect deeply on the spiritual meaning of this gift. For example, a couple struggling with infertility might see surrogacy as a way to fulfill their longing for children, but it is essential to weigh this desire against the broader implications of God's purpose for life and family.

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5.1.3. Psychological Insights on Parenting and Procreation

Psychologists emphasize the importance of viewing parenthood as a holistic process that nurtures not only a child's physical well-being but also their emotional and spiritual development. Dr. Ross Campbell, in *How to Really Love Your Child*, highlights that children blossom best when they are raised in an environment where love and stability are grounded in the unity of their parents.²⁴ Introducing a third party, such as a surrogate, into this deeply intimate process can create complexities in the parent-child bond and the marital relationship. Couples must consider how surrogacy might affect their emotional connection to the child and their sense of shared purpose as parents.

5.1.4. The Role of Shared Sacrifice in Marriage

Procreation often requires sacrifices, whether physical, emotional, or financial. These sacrifices, shared between husband and wife, deepen the marital bond and reflect the selflessness that God calls for in marriage. For instance, when one spouse prioritizes childbearing over career aspirations, it demonstrates a commitment to the family's spiritual and emotional growth. Alternatively, when couples face challenges in conceiving, turning to prayer and mutual support can reinforce their trust in God's plan. Surrogacy, while offering a potential solution, should be approached with caution to ensure that the decision aligns with the sacrificial love inherent in the marital covenant.

5.1.5. An Example to Reflect On

Consider the story of a couple where the wife, a successful entrepreneur, struggled with balancing her career ambitions and her desire to start a family. They prayerfully discussed the possibility of

²⁴ Ross Campbell, *How to Really Love Your Child* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2015), 23–26.

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surrogacy, but through their conversations, they realized that the act of carrying a child herself would be a profound expression of their marital unity and shared faith. Together, they chose to embrace this journey, finding strength in each other and in God's timing. This decision not only deepened their bond but also reaffirmed their commitment to trust God's plan for their family.

Understanding the sanctity of marriage and procreation requires seeing children not just as personal desires but as divine blessings meant to reflect God's love and purpose. By grounding their decisions in faith, open communication, and sacrificial love, couples can honor the sacredness of life and the covenant of marriage.

5.2. The Ethical Concerns of Surrogacy

- How do you view the ethical implications of surrogacy, such as the commodification of human life and the risk of exploitation?
- In what ways can couples approach these ethical dilemmas while honoring the dignity of all involved?
- How does the principle of human beings made in God's image (Genesis 1:27) inform your thoughts on surrogacy?

Surrogacy is a deeply emotional and complex decision that raises significant ethical questions, particularly about the sanctity of human life and the potential for exploitation. As couples consider this path, it is vital to reflect on the broader moral implications and how they align with their values and faith.

5.2.1 Commodification of Life

The decision to pay a surrogate to carry a child introduces the risk of reducing human life to a transactional commodity. Genesis 1:27 reminds us, "So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of

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God he created them; male and female he created them.” This profound truth underscores the sacredness of every human life, which is meant to be revered and protected. Surrogacy, particularly when it involves financial transactions, can distort this understanding by framing the process of conception and childbirth in economic terms. For example, treating life as something that can be purchased undermines the intrinsic value of the child and the sacred bond between parent and child. This commodification challenges Christian principles that emphasize the dignity and sanctity of life as a divine gift.

5.2.2. Potential Exploitation

Surrogacy arrangements, especially those involving monetary compensation, often raise concerns about the exploitation of vulnerable women. Proverbs 22:22 warns, “Do not exploit the poor because they are poor and do not crush the needy in court.” Many surrogates, particularly in economically disadvantaged regions, enter into these agreements out of financial necessity rather than free choice. This dynamic creates power imbalances, where the surrogate’s dignity and autonomy may be compromised. For instance, a woman in a financially precarious situation may feel compelled to agree to terms that do not fully respect her well-being or future, raising questions about justice and the ethical treatment of all parties involved.

5.2.3. Psychological and Emotional Impact on Surrogates

Psychologists highlight the potential emotional toll on surrogate mothers, who may struggle with the separation from a child they carried for nine months. Dr. Nancy L. Segal, in her work on surrogacy and twin studies points out that surrogates often experience emotional attachment to the child, making relinquishment a psychologically challenging

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process²⁵. The lack of adequate support for surrogates post-delivery can further amplify these emotional challenges, leaving them vulnerable to feelings of loss and exploitation.

5.2.4. Examples and Ethical Dilemmas

Consider a case where a surrogate agrees to carry a child for a couple but faces unexpected medical complications during the pregnancy. In commercial arrangements, such scenarios can lead to disputes about medical costs, the surrogate's health, and the couple's responsibility. Such conflicts highlight the ethical dilemmas that arise when surrogacy is viewed through a transactional lens. Questions of justice, care, and accountability become even more critical, requiring couples to reflect deeply on the moral responsibilities involved in these arrangements.

5.2.5. Protecting the Dignity of All Involved

The Church emphasizes the importance of upholding the dignity of all individuals in reproductive decisions. The Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC 2376) critiques surrogacy, stating, "Techniques that entail the dissociation of husband and wife, by the intrusion of a person other than the couple, are gravely immoral."²⁶ This teaching calls couples to consider alternatives that respect the integrity of marriage and the sacredness of human life. The ethical concerns surrounding surrogacy demand careful consideration of the sanctity of life and the dignity of all involved. By reflecting on these issues through a lens of faith, justice, and compassion, couples can make decisions that honor their values and uphold the sacred principles of human dignity and love.

²⁵ Nancy L. Segal, *Born Together - Reared Apart: The Landmark Minnesota Twin Study* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 156–159.

²⁶ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed. (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997), sec. 2376.

5.3. Spiritual and Emotional Consequences

- How might surrogacy impact the emotional and spiritual connection between spouses?
- What steps can you take to address potential feelings of inadequacy, jealousy, or resentment that might arise in the surrogacy process?
- How can you help children born through surrogacy navigate questions of identity and belonging?

Surrogacy extends beyond ethical concerns to touch deeply on the emotional and spiritual dimensions of marriage and parenthood. It introduces challenges that can affect the marital relationship, the surrogate, and the child, requiring careful reflection and preparation.

5.3.1 Impact on the Marital Relationship

Inviting a surrogate into the sacred circle of marriage may introduce tension and strain between spouses. Ecclesiastes 4:9-10 highlights the strength of mutual support: “Two are better than one because they have a good return for their labor: If either of them falls down, one can help the other up.” Yet surrogacy can evoke feelings of inadequacy in the spouse who cannot conceive or a sense of detachment for the spouse less involved in the process. For instance, a husband might feel distant from the pregnancy, while a wife may struggle with emotions of loss or guilt over not carrying the child. Open communication, coupled with prayer, becomes essential in navigating these feelings. Couples must remind themselves of their shared commitment to their marriage and their future family, addressing emotional challenges together.

5.3.2. Bonding and Identity Issues

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For children born through surrogacy, understanding their origins can raise questions about identity and belonging. The Bible beautifully captures the bond between parent and child in Isaiah 49:15 as it says “Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne?” However, when a child learns that they were carried by a surrogate, they may grapple with feelings of confusion or detachment. Psychologists emphasize the importance of transparency and open dialogue in addressing these concerns. Dr. Susan Golombok, in her book *Modern Families: Parents and Children in New Family Forms*, notes that children born through alternative means of conception benefit when parents approach the topic with honesty and love, providing reassurance of their unique and valued place in the family.²⁷

5.3.3. Emotional Toll on the Surrogate

The surrogate mother’s emotional experience is another critical consideration. Carrying a child creates a profound bond, and parting with the baby after birth can lead to feelings of loss, regardless of prior agreements. For instance, surrogates may struggle with attachment issues, especially in cases where they feel excluded from the child’s life post-delivery. Supporting surrogates with counseling and care throughout the process is essential to ensure their emotional well-being. The Bible calls for compassion and understanding in relationships: “Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ” (Galatians 6:2).

5.3.4. Spiritual Questions and Struggles

Surrogacy may also prompt spiritual questions for the couple, including whether their decision aligns with God’s will for their family. Couples may feel guilt or uncertainty, fearing that they have taken matters into their own hands rather than trusting in God’s plan. Psalm

²⁷ Susan Golombok, *Modern Families: Parents and Children in New Family Forms* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 89–92.

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37:7 encourages believers to “Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him.” Turning to God in prayer and seeking guidance from spiritual leaders can provide clarity and peace during these moments of doubt.

5.3.5. Maintaining Unity Through Faith

A shared spiritual foundation can help couples navigate the complexities of surrogacy. Regular prayer and participation in faith-based discussions allow couples to reaffirm their commitment to each other and to God’s purpose for their family. The African proverb, “A family is like a forest—when you are outside it is dense, but when you are inside you see that each tree has its place,” serves as a reminder that unity and faith bring strength even in challenging situations. Couples must strive to ensure that every decision reflects their shared values and the sacredness of their marital covenant.

It’s good to note that surrogacy carries profound emotional and spiritual consequences that can affect the couple, the child, and the surrogate. The bond between the child and the mother is deeply emotional and spiritual, and alternative methods of conception may affect how it is formed. Parents must be prepared to address these issues with love, honesty, and grace.

5.4. Alternatives and God's Plan for Parenthood

- How can you trust God’s timing and plan when faced with challenges in conceiving children?
- How does adoption reflect God’s love and the call to care for others?
- What steps can you take to discern and embrace alternative paths to parenthood that honor God’s design for family?

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When faced with challenges in conceiving, couples are invited to reflect on their faith and trust in God's greater plan for their lives. Parenthood is a divine calling, and even when the path is uncertain, God provides alternative ways to experience the joys and responsibilities of raising children while honoring His design for life and family.

5.4.1. Trusting God's Timing and Will

Trusting God's timing is an act of faith, requiring couples to surrender their plans and desires to His divine wisdom. Psalm 37:5 encourages believers to, "Commit your way to the Lord; trust in him, and he will do this." Waiting can be challenging, particularly in a society that values immediate solutions, but God's timing is always perfect. Couples struggling with delayed parenthood can turn to prayer, seeking His guidance and strength. For example, the story of Abraham and Sarah in Genesis 21 demonstrates how patience and trust in God resulted in the miraculous birth of Isaac, even when hope seemed lost. Their journey reminds couples that God's promises are fulfilled in His perfect time, often in ways that surpass human understanding.

5.4.2. Adoption as a Loving Option

Adoption offers a beautiful opportunity to expand a family while fulfilling God's call to care for the vulnerable. James 1:27 declares, "Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress." Through adoption, couples not only meet their longing for parenthood but also extend God's love to a child in need. Adoption reflects the spiritual reality of believers being adopted into God's family through Christ. For instance, Ephesians 1:5 states, "He predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will." This parallel underscores adoption's sacredness as an act of grace and love.

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5.4.3. Psychological Insights on Adoption and Non-Biological Parenthood

Psychologists affirm that adoption can provide a stable and nurturing environment for children, offering them a chance to thrive in loving homes. Dr. Susan Golombok, highlights that adopted children cost well emotionally and socially when raised in secure and supportive families²⁸. For couples, the adoption journey often brings profound emotional fulfillment and spiritual growth as they experience the transformative power of unconditional love. However, preparation and counseling are essential to address the unique dynamics of adoptive parenthood, ensuring that both parents and children navigate the process with understanding and grace.

5.4.4. Fostering as a Temporary Calling

For some couples, fostering may serve as a temporary yet impactful way to care for children in need. By providing a safe and loving home for children in transitional phases, couples live out Christ's example of compassion. This form of parenting, while not permanent, allows couples to make a meaningful difference while discerning God's long-term plan for their family. Fostering is an expression of generosity and faith, demonstrating a willingness to care for others even amidst personal uncertainty.

Imagine a couple, Jackson and Reginah, who felt called to foster after attending a church seminar on child welfare. They opened their home to a 10-year-old boy, Samuel, whose parents were temporarily unable to care for him due to health and financial issues. For six months, Jackson and Reginah provided Samuel with a stable home environment,

²⁸ Susan Golombok, *Modern Families: Parents and Children in New Family Forms* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 120–124.

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ensuring he continued attending school and engaging in family activities like meals and bedtime prayers. Although they knew Samuel's stay was temporary, they poured love and care into him, teaching him the values of kindness and trust. When Samuel reunited with his parents, Jackson and Reginah found fulfillment in knowing they had made a difference during a crucial period of his life. They remained connected with Samuel and his family, supporting them as they rebuilt their stability. This experience strengthened their faith and deepened their understanding of what it means to live out God's love.

5.4.5 An Example of Trust and Faith in Action

Consider the story of a couple who, after years of trying to conceive, chose to adopt a child from a local orphanage. While the process was long and required emotional resilience, they found immense joy in welcoming their adopted son into their family. Through prayer and reflection, they embraced their role as parents, recognizing the child as a gift from God. Their story illustrates how trusting in God's plan can lead to unexpected blessings, reinforcing the truth of Jeremiah 29:11: "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."

When biological conception proves challenging, couples can find hope and purpose by trusting in God's timing and exploring alternatives like adoption or nurturing. These paths honor the sanctity of life and reflect God's love and care for all His children. Through prayer, discernment, and an unwavering commitment to faith, couples can embrace the journey of parenthood in ways that align with God's perfect will.

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5.5. The Importance of Open Communication and Prayer

- How can open communication with your spouse foster unity and understanding when navigating the decision to use surrogacy?
- What role does prayer play in seeking God's guidance for complex decisions about parenthood?
- How can prayer and spiritual discernment help align your family's choices with God's will and strengthen your marital bond?

Parenthood, with its joys and challenges, requires thoughtful decision-making rooted in mutual understanding and a shared reliance on God. Open communication between spouses and consistent prayer are vital in navigating these significant choices, especially when considering options like surrogacy or adoption.

5.5.1. Communicating as a Couple

Effective communication is the cornerstone of a strong marriage, particularly when facing emotionally charged decisions. Ephesians 4:15 encourages believers to “speak the truth in love,” a principle that applies profoundly to the marital relationship. Couples must openly share their hopes, fears, and uncertainties, creating an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect. For example, a wife may feel apprehensive about the implications of surrogacy on their family dynamics, while her husband may worry about the financial or ethical aspects. By discussing these concerns candidly, they can work together to find solutions that honor their marriage and align with their shared values. This level of honesty not only fosters unity but also strengthens the emotional bond between partners as they manage complex decisions.

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5.5.2. The Role of Active Listening

Communication is not just about expressing thoughts but also about actively listening to each other. Psychologist Dr. John Gottman highlights in *The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work* that active listening is critical for resolving conflicts and understanding one another's perspectives²⁹. When couples listen without interrupting or dismissing their partner's feelings, they create a safe space for vulnerability and deeper connection. This practice is especially crucial when discussing sensitive topics like parenthood, where emotions and expectations can run high.

5.5.3. Seeking God's Guidance in Prayer

Prayer is a powerful tool that invites God's wisdom into the decision-making process. Philippians 4:6-7 encourages believers to "present their requests to God" and promises His peace in return. Couples facing uncertainties about parenthood can find clarity and reassurance by praying together, laying their concerns before God, and seeking His direction. For instance, a couple struggling to decide between surrogacy and adoption might dedicate time to prayer, asking for discernment and strength to make a choice that aligns with His will. Prayer not only provides guidance but also fosters spiritual intimacy between spouses, uniting them in their shared faith journey.

5.5.4. The Impact of Spiritual Leadership

Taking turns leading prayers or suggesting scripture readings relevant to their situation can empower both partners to take an active role in seeking God's guidance. This shared spiritual leadership reinforces the idea that they are equal partners in both their marriage and

²⁹ John Gottman and Nan Silver, *The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work* (New York: Crown Publishers, Three Rivers Press, 1999), 82–85.

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their relationship with God. It also sets a powerful example for their future children, demonstrating the importance of faith in navigating life's challenges.

5.5.5. Prayer and Unity in Action

Consider the story of Mark and Wanjiku, a couple wrestling with the decision to pursue surrogacy due to infertility. Initially, their discussions were fraught with tension and misunderstandings. However, when they committed to praying together daily and discussing their concerns in the light of scripture, they found a renewed sense of unity. Over time, they discerned that adoption was the path God had planned for them, and they embraced it with peace and confidence. This experience deepened their love for one another and strengthened their reliance on God.

By speaking honestly, listening actively, and seeking God's guidance, couples can navigate complex choices with unity and faith. These practices not only lead to wise decisions but also fortify the marital bond, ensuring that the journey of parenthood begins with love, trust, and spiritual alignment.

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CHAPTER 6: ADDRESSING IMBALANCE IN FAMILY CONCERNS

The inspiration for this chapter came from a heartfelt conversation I had with a lady who was going through a significant challenge in her family. Desperate for guidance, she asked me, “Father, why is it that when it comes to my family’s problems, my husband shows little concern, but when it’s his family, he is deeply involved? What can I do to solve this?” At first glance, her question might lead one to assume that, in general, men are often more concerned about their own families and less about their spouse’s. But before jumping to conclusions, I want to share a real-life story that highlights how both men and women can contribute to this imbalance. It’s not always the husband at fault—sometimes, even wives prioritize their own families over their spouse’s.



In this story I will use random names [Norbert and Anastacia]. The story revolves around Mr. Norbert and his wife, Anastacia. One day, Norbert decided to surprise his wife with a special visit of their children’s grandparents. “My parents will be visiting us this Saturday,” Norbert informed Anastacia. “I’ve invited them for dinner so they can spend time with their grandchildren. What do you think we can prepare for them? Can you make a budget and perhaps go shopping during the week?” Anastacia’s response was cold and dismissive. “Shopping for what? They will eat whatever we have.” Norbert was taken aback, trying to

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keep the conversation light. “Honey, don’t you want to make this day special for our visitors and the family?” But Anastacia brushed it off, showing no interest in making any extra effort.

On Saturday morning, Norbert left for work as usual but reminded Anastacia that the visitors would arrive at 2 PM, and he had arranged for a taxi to pick them up. “They’ll spend the night with us, and I’ll be back from work in the evening.” At 1:30 PM, after lunch, Anastacia decided to go to the salon for a hair appointment. By 2 PM, visitors (parents to Anastacia) arrived at the house, only to be greeted by their grandchildren. Nothing had been prepared for them, and Anastacia was nowhere to be found. The children, confused, asked, “Where’s Mum?” The youngest child, Njeri, excitedly ran to the salon to tell her mother, “*Mum, mum! Guka na Shosho wa Moranga wako home*” (Grandpa and Grandma from Moranga are home).

Moranga was where Anastacia’s own parents lived. Suddenly, it dawned on Anastacia that the visitors were not Norbert’s parents but hers. Panicked, and with two hours left to finish her hair, she agitatedly called her husband. “Baba Njeri! Our visitors are here, and there’s nothing prepared in the house. What should I do?” Norbert calmly replied, “Mama Njeri, remember what you said— ‘they will eat whatever they find’. I’ve done my part, now it’s your turn.”* In disbelief, Anastacia protested, “Why didn’t you tell me they were my parents coming?...”

The story of Norbert and Anastacia reveals a common issue many couples face: one partner appears more concerned with their own family’s matters than those of their spouse. The question, "Why is it that when it comes to my family’s problems, my husband shows little concern, but when it’s his family, he is deeply involved?" raises the critical issue of imbalance in family priorities. This session will explore

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how couples can work together to address and solve this imbalance, ensuring both partners feel equally valued and supported.

6.1. Acknowledge and Understand Each Other's Emotions

- How well do you understand your spouse's feelings about family dynamics?
- In what ways can you create a safe space for each other to express emotions without fear of judgment?
- How does acknowledging your spouse's emotions strengthen trust and unity in your marriage?

Marriage is a journey of unity and understanding, where both partners must feel heard and valued in all aspects, including family dynamics. The Bible emphasizes the importance of empathy and love in relationships. In 1 Peter 3:7, husbands are urged to live considerately with their wives, treating them with respect and understanding. This principle extends to both partners—each must take time to listen and validate the other's feelings. If one spouse feels neglected because the other is more concerned with their own family, this imbalance can create emotional tension. A spouse's feelings of neglect as reflected in the question from the anonymous lady reflect the importance of acknowledging and understanding the emotions that arise when priorities seem uneven.

Saint John Paul II, in his apostolic exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*, emphasized that marriage is built on a foundation of mutual love³⁰ and self-giving³¹, where each partner must prioritize the other's

³⁰ John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio* (Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on the Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World), November 22, 1981, Vatican, paragraph 35.

³¹ John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio* (Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on the Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World), November 22, 1981, Vatican, paragraph 22.

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emotional well-being. When one spouse feels like they are competing with the other's family for attention, it can lead to resentment. As seen with Anastacia and Norbert, failure to address these emotions can create emotional distance, affecting their unity. Couples must actively create opportunities to discuss how they feel about family relationships and priorities, ensuring that neither partner feels sidelined or undervalued.

To foster a healthy emotional balance, couples should create a safe space for open communication, where both partners listen without judgment. This aligns with Ephesians 4:2, which encourages believers to "be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love." In marriage, this patience is crucial, especially when navigating sensitive issues like family dynamics. By addressing feelings openly and honestly, couples can prevent emotional hurt and build a stronger, more resilient relationship, grounded in mutual respect and love.

6. 2. Communicate Expectations for Family Involvement

- Have you openly discussed your expectations regarding involvement with each other's families?
- How can clear communication about family roles and responsibilities reduce misunderstandings?
- What steps can you take to ensure that family expectations align with your shared values and priorities?

Clear communication is the foundation of a healthy marriage, especially when it comes to family involvement. In Ephesians 4:15, the Bible encourages believers to "speak the truth in love," which applies directly to the communication between spouses. Couples must openly express their expectations about how each partner should engage with the other's family. In the story of Norbert and Anastacia, the tension arose largely because they had not communicated their needs or expectations about family support. This led to misunderstandings and

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disappointment. If Anastacia had communicated her desire for Norbert to be equally concerned about her family, and if Norbert had expressed his hopes for how his family should be treated, they could have avoided conflict.

Pope Francis, in *Amoris Laetitia*, emphasizes the importance of communication in marriage. He states that "dialogue is essential for experiencing, expressing and fostering love in marriage and family life."³² This dialogue is crucial when discussing how to handle familial obligations and support. Without clear conversations about family involvement, couples may operate on assumptions that lead to unmet expectations. Just as Norbert assumed that Anastacia would warmly welcome his parents, Anastacia might have assumed that Norbert would automatically care for her family in the same way. These assumptions can be damaging when they remain unspoken.

Couples should engage in a transparent conversation where both partners clearly articulate how they want to support each other's families. This conversation should cover emotional support, practical assistance, and involvement in family events. Philippians 2:4 instructs us to "look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others." In a marriage, this means considering not only your own family's needs but also those of your spouse. Mutual understanding and clear communication about these expectations can prevent feelings of neglect and resentment, creating a more harmonious relationship where both partners feel supported and valued.

6. 3. Foster Equal Involvement with Both Families

- Do you feel that both sides of your family receive equal care and attention? Why or why not?

³² Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia: The Joy of Love* (Vatican City: Vatican Press, 2016), paragraph 136.

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- How can you and your spouse work together to ensure balanced involvement with each other's families?
- What specific actions can you take to show mutual respect and support for both families?

In marriage, it's essential that both partners make an intentional effort to be involved with each other's families, showing equal care and concern. The Bible teaches that "love is patient and kind, and it does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking" (1 Corinthians 13:4-5). This kind of selfless love should guide spouses as they build relationships with each other's families. In the story, Norbert didn't fully understand how much Anastacia valued his involvement with her family, which led to tension. For a marriage to thrive, both partners must be sensitive to how the other perceives family interactions and make efforts to ensure both sides feel equally respected and cherished.

Pope John Paul II, in *Familiaris Consortio*, emphasized that marriage brings two families together, requiring a delicate balance in managing both relationships. He states that the family is a "community of love and life"³³. This community transcends the nuclear family, encompassing extended relatives as well. Couples should view their involvement with both families as part of their commitment to fostering peace and unity. This requires deliberate actions, such as attending gatherings, supporting each other's family members in difficult times, and ensuring that both families feel included in the couple's life.

While it may be natural for one partner to feel more connected to their own family, fostering equal involvement requires a conscious, ongoing effort. Galatians 6:2 calls us to "bear one another's burdens," which applies not only to our spouse but also to their extended family.

³³ John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio* (Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on the Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World), November 22, 1981, Vatican, paragraph 37.

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Couples should create a schedule or system where they prioritize time and care for both sides of the family. This shared involvement shows a commitment to building a harmonious and united marriage where both families feel appreciated and loved. In doing so, the couple strengthens their bond and cultivates an environment of mutual respect and understanding.

6. 4. Share Responsibilities for Family Issues

- How can sharing responsibilities for family concerns prevent one partner from feeling overwhelmed?
- What strategies can you use to approach family challenges as a team?
- How does sharing responsibilities reflect the biblical call to unity and partnership in marriage?

Responsibility of caring for both families should be shared equally between spouses. The Bible calls for mutual support in all aspects of life, including family relationships. Ephesians 5:21 encourages couples to “submit to one another out of reverence for Christ,” meaning that both partners should take equal responsibility in family matters. In the story of Norbert and Anastacia, Norbert was proactive in planning for their parents’ visit, but Anastacia did not feel the same obligation to take care of these visitors thinking they were her in-laws. This imbalance can lead to feelings of neglect and frustration, ultimately causing tension in the marriage.

In *Amoris Laetitia*, Pope Francis emphasizes the importance of mutual care and cooperation in family life, stating that “love also impels us towards communion with others.” This concept is discussed in Chapter 4, “Love in Marriage,” where he reflects on the nature of love as described in 1 Corinthians 13:4–7. He explains that authentic love within marriage not only strengthens the bond between spouses but also extends

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outward, fostering a spirit of communion and solidarity with others. This outward movement of love underscores the communal dimension of family life, encouraging families to be open and connected to the broader community.

The word *others* here can also include both sides of the extended family. When couples share responsibilities for family obligations—whether it's organizing family events, providing emotional or financial support, or making decisions together—they show respect and unity. This cooperative approach not only strengthens the marital bond but also helps both families feel equally valued and supported.

To avoid resentment, couples should have open discussions about the division of family-related duties and create a plan that works for both of them. By sharing these responsibilities equally, neither partner will feel overburdened or left out, which promotes a healthy and balanced relationship. Remember that Galatians 6:2 calls Christians to "bear one another's burdens," a principle that should be applied within marriage. By carrying the load together, both partners can foster a spirit of teamwork and cooperation, which leads to a stronger, more unified marriage and family life.

6. 5. Practice Empathy and Compromise

- How does practicing empathy help you better understand your spouse's perspective on family matters?
- What compromises can you make to address any imbalance in family concerns?
- How can you and your spouse use empathy and compromise to strengthen your marriage and bring harmony to family relationships?

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Marriage thrives on empathy and compromise, especially when navigating family dynamics. In Philippians 2:4, we are encouraged, “Let each of you look not only to his own interests but also to the interests of others.” This biblical principle applies perfectly in marriage, where spouses are called to consider each other's feelings and priorities. In the case of Norbert and Anastacia, their conflict arose from a lack of empathy and compromise. Norbert's expectation that Anastacia would manage their visitors' visit without considering her feelings led to tension. Likewise, Anastacia's resistance to preparing for the mentioned visitors only because she thought they were here in-laws revealed her lack of cooperation.

The teaching of Pope John Paul II, in *Familiaris Consortio* underline that “the love that animates the interpersonal relationships of the different members of the family constitutes the interior strength that shapes and animates the family communion.”³⁴ Both Norbert and Anastacia would have benefited from empathizing with each other's perspectives: Norbert could have considered Anastacia's workload and emotional state, while Anastacia could have recognized the importance of the visit to their family and made efforts to accommodate her husband's wishes. Empathy fosters deeper understanding and prevents unnecessary conflict.

Cooperation is essential to resolve such situations. Both partners should be willing to meet each other halfway, adjusting their expectations to support each other's needs. As Ephesians 4:2 advises, “Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.” Couples need to create a culture of negotiation, where neither partner feels sidelined. By making small sacrifices for one another,

³⁴ John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio* (Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on the Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World), November 22, 1981, Vatican, paragraph 21.

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spouses can ensure their relationship remains balanced and harmonious, preventing future misunderstandings regarding family involvement.

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CHAPTER 7: HOW CAN YOU NAVIGATE SILENCE IN MARRIAGE?

Communication is indeed foundational to resolving conflicts in marriage, but what happens when one partner is unwilling or unable to engage in open dialogue? In this chapter, we want to explore constructive ways to approach this challenge, offering practical steps to create a more receptive environment for communication, that foster understanding, and protect the marriage bond. With insights drawn from the Bible, church teachings, African wisdom, and modern psychology, couples can find guidance for managing this delicate situation.



7.1. Patience and Understanding

- How do you usually respond when your spouse becomes silent during a conflict?
- In what ways can practicing patience help your spouse feel safe to open up?
- How can you show empathy and understanding when your spouse is struggling to communicate?

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In any marriage, when one partner is unwilling or hesitant to communicate, the first response should be patience and empathy. Often, a partner's reluctance to open up stems from deeper emotional barriers, such as fear, past trauma, or feeling misunderstood. In these cases, pushing for immediate dialogue can lead to further withdrawal. Instead, patience creates an atmosphere of safety, allowing the hesitant partner to feel more at ease. Proverbs 14:29 reminds us, "Whoever is patient has great understanding, but one who is quick-tempered displays folly." This wisdom invites spouses to approach their partner's silence with compassion, recognizing that deeper issues might need time to surface.

The Church emphasizes this approach, understanding that silence can signify an internal struggle rather than a lack of love or commitment. Pope Francis, in *Amoris Laetitia*, encourages couples to respond to each other's silence with love and understanding, gently acknowledging that each person may have burdens they find difficult to share. Referring to St Paul, Pope Francis highlights that love includes "a readiness to understand, to forgive, and to accept the other person's faults and failures." He encourages spouses to be patient with each other's weaknesses, as these struggles do not necessarily reflect a lack of love or commitment.

By treating a partner's hesitation with patience and kindness, one can nurture a supportive environment where dialogue becomes possible over time. Silence, in this light, is not an end but a space for emotional reflection that can eventually lead to openness.

Patience in these moments is not passive; it is an active expression of love and care. Giving a spouse time to process their feelings demonstrates respect for their individual pace and need for reflection. When we are patient, we communicate that our love is not contingent on immediate answers or rushed conversations. Instead, we

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are willing to wait for genuine, heartfelt dialogue when our partner feels ready.

Timing is crucial in such situations. Pushing a partner for answers when they are not ready can lead to defensive reactions and create even deeper emotional blocks. Sometimes, giving space—whether for a few hours or even a few days—can pave the way for a conversation that is far more meaningful and constructive. Proverbs 19:11 reinforces this idea, saying, “A person’s wisdom yields patience; it is to one’s glory to overlook an offense.” This wisdom helps us understand that waiting with grace can be more effective than demanding answers in moments of silence.

In essence, practicing patience when faced with a partner’s silence lays a foundation of trust and understanding. It shows that the relationship is strong enough to hold space for each other’s fears and insecurities. Through patience, one partner can gently lead the other toward an eventual willingness to communicate, making future conversations not only possible but deeply meaningful.

7.2. Modeling Vulnerability and Openness

- How comfortable are you with sharing your own feelings and vulnerabilities with your spouse?
- How might your openness encourage your partner to reciprocate in communication?
- What steps can you take to model trust and emotional safety in your relationship?

When one partner is reluctant to communicate, modeling vulnerability and openness can be a powerful way to encourage them. Psychologist Brené Brown highlights that vulnerability is not a weakness; rather, it breaks down emotional walls, inviting trust and

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connection. The concept of vulnerability as a strength rather than a weakness is discussed extensively in Brené Brown's. In her book, *Daring Greatly*, she explores how embracing vulnerability can foster trust, connection, and emotional resilience in relationships. Specifically, she writes, “Vulnerability is not winning or losing; it’s having the courage to show up and be seen when we have no control over the outcome. Vulnerability is not weakness; it’s our greatest measure of courage.”³⁵ This insight underscores the idea that when one partner models vulnerability by sharing personal feelings and struggles without blame, it can create a safe environment where the other partner feels invited to do the same. By openly sharing feelings, worries, or personal struggles calmly and without blame, one partner can create an atmosphere where the other feels safe enough to express themselves. This openness invites dialogue and reassures the hesitant spouse that they are not alone in their feelings, fostering a stronger emotional bond.

The Bible underscores the quiet influence that patient vulnerability can have in encouraging a partner to open up. In 1 Peter 3:1-2, Peter describes how a spouse’s actions can impact the other without the need for words: “Wives, in the same way, submit yourselves to your own husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives.” Although directed at wives, this principle can be extended to all relationships. One spouse’s quiet and loving behavior, rooted in patience and gentleness, can serve as a silent example that inspires the other. Demonstrating vulnerability and openness without pushing or demanding a response allows the partner to feel valued and respected, rather than pressured.

³⁵ Brené Brown, *Daring Greatly: How the Courage to Be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent, and Lead* (New York: Gotham Books, 2012), 34.

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This approach means sharing personal experiences, emotions, and concerns in a non-confrontational way. Speaking from the heart about one's own feelings without focusing on the other's actions invites the spouse to reciprocate without feeling defensive. Sharing from a place of vulnerability—"I feel lonely when we don't talk about our worries" rather than "You never listen to me"—can make a significant difference in how the message is received. It invites the other person to see the impact of silence, encouraging them to join the conversation out of empathy rather than obligation.

Creating a safe space for openness often requires setting aside the need for immediate answers. Vulnerability is an act of trust and respect, one that gently encourages the other person to engage without feeling pressured or judged. As partners grow in the practice of sharing their innermost thoughts and feelings, they cultivate a deeper trust, where each person feels seen, heard, and understood. This practice strengthens the marriage, establishing an environment where both partners feel free to express themselves fully, knowing they will be met with love and acceptance.

7.3. Seek alternative forms of expression

- Have you tried non-verbal ways of expressing your feelings, such as writing letters or sharing a meaningful gesture?
- How could exploring alternative forms of communication help break the silence in your marriage?
- What tools or creative methods can you and your spouse use to express your thoughts and emotions constructively?

In situations where verbal communication feels strained or blocked, exploring alternative forms of expression can help bridge the gap. Communication doesn't have to be confined to face-to-face dialogue; sometimes, writing a heartfelt letter, sharing a daily reflection,

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or even sending a thoughtful text can open doors that spoken words cannot. These alternative forms of expression allow each partner to share their thoughts gently and thoughtfully, without the pressure or intensity of a direct conversation. By creating space for quiet reflection, these methods provide opportunities for connection that feel less confrontational yet deeply meaningful.

An African proverb speaks to the power of words, saying, “Words are like arrows: once released, they cannot return.” This wisdom reminds us of the importance of choosing our expressions with care. When emotions are high, spoken words can sometimes be rushed, reactive, or even hurtful. Written words, on the other hand, allow time for reflection, helping to ensure that what is shared is constructive, gentle, and kind. Writing a letter or note encourages thoughtful communication, giving each partner time to reflect on their words, intentions, and the impact they might have on the other person.

This approach is especially beneficial for the partner who may struggle with verbal expression. Writing down thoughts or feelings allows them to take their time, reducing the pressure of immediate responses. A letter or message also allows the other partner to receive and consider the words in their own time, rather than reacting impulsively. By creating a reflective environment, couples can communicate effectively while preserving a sense of respect and consideration for each other’s emotional boundaries.

Alternative forms of expression can also serve as keepsakes, reminders of efforts to connect even in challenging times. These letters, messages, or reflections can be revisited, allowing both partners to recognize the love and patience they have extended to each other. This method fosters a slow but intentional form of connection, gradually restoring trust and openness in a relationship that may feel strained by misunderstandings or unspoken hurt. By embracing these alternative

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forms, couples can nurture a gentler, more understanding relationship, where each voice is valued and heard.

7.4. Pray and reflect together for divine guidance

- How often do you and your spouse pray together, especially during challenging times?
- How does inviting God into your marital struggles bring peace and clarity to your situation?
- What specific prayers or reflections can you incorporate to help address communication barriers in your relationship?

In times of marital difficulty, prayer and reflection invite God's presence into the relationship, allowing both partners to see each other's hearts more clearly. When one partner struggles with communication, prayer can be a powerful way to bring the couple closer, helping them approach each other with understanding and grace. James 1:5 says: "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him." By turning to God for guidance, the partner seeking communication finds strength and wisdom to approach the situation with patience, trusting that God's grace can soften hearts and open doors.

The Church upholds the power of prayer as a transformative tool in marriage. Through prayer, God works to soften hearts, deepen empathy, and illuminate the path toward understanding. Pope Francis, in *Amoris Laetitia*, speaks about the value of praying together in marriage, emphasizing that prayer is a source of strength and connection; "the family that prays together stays together"³⁶. Praying together, even in silence, can create a deep sense of unity and peace, grounding the relationship in faith. When couples invite God's guidance, they become

³⁶ Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia: The Joy of Love* (Vatican City: Vatican Press, 2016), paragraph 227.

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more receptive to each other, cultivating a compassionate atmosphere where both partners feel valued and supported.

Praying as a couple is a powerful way to break down communication barriers, but individual prayer is also essential. When one spouse is reluctant to communicate, the other can pray for patience and understanding, seeking God's guidance in how to approach their partner with love. Through this private reflection, they can ask for the strength to respond to silence with gentleness, rather than frustration. This individual prayer fosters an inner peace that, in turn, influences the way they interact with their partner, creating a space where trust and openness can grow.

In moments of conflict or distance, shared prayer serves as a reminder of the vows made and the love that brought the couple together. It redirects focus from the problem itself to the faith that sustains the marriage. By entrusting their struggles to God, couples can find the clarity and compassion needed to navigate difficult times. This practice strengthens the spiritual foundation of the marriage, reminding both partners that they are united not only with each other but also with God, whose love and wisdom guide them through every challenge.

7.5. Seek Counseling

- Have you considered seeking professional or spiritual counseling to address silence in your marriage?
- What are the potential benefits of involving a neutral third party in navigating your communication challenges?
- How can counseling provide practical tools to improve understanding and break down barriers between you and your spouse?

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Seeking help from a counselor or trusted advisor can be a valuable step toward restoring dialogue and understanding in the relationship. Professional counseling provides couples with practical tools for effective communication and offers a neutral perspective, allowing each partner to feel truly heard and respected. With the help of a counselor, spouses can gain new insights into their relationship dynamics, addressing misunderstandings that may have previously gone unrecognized.

Psychological insight also supports the value of counseling, as psychologists often recommend therapy when communication barriers are too difficult to overcome alone. A neutral third party can provide a safe, structured environment for both partners to express their thoughts and emotions without fear of judgment. This approach allows each spouse to explore underlying issues that may be contributing to their reluctance to communicate openly. In therapy, couples can develop healthy communication habits, finding new ways to connect and understand each other.

Seeking counseling or support reflects a commitment to the health of the marriage. Rather than viewing external help as a last resort, couples can embrace it as a constructive step toward mutual growth and reconciliation. In doing so, they honor their commitment to love and support each other through all of life's challenges, demonstrating that no obstacle is insurmountable with the right tools and guidance.

**CHAPTER 8: THE ROLE OF INTIMACY IN RESTORING
PEACE IN MARRIAGE**

In marriage, conflicts and misunderstandings are inevitable, but the way couples handle these moments can either strengthen or strain their relationship. A question often arises: should sex be used as a tool or reason for peace after an argument? While physical intimacy can play a part in restoring closeness, it should not be the primary or sole way of resolving conflicts. This chapter explores the role of intimacy in reconciliation within marriage, structured around key principles rooted in biblical wisdom, church teachings, and African proverbs.



8.1. Importance of communication over sex as physical reconciliation

- How does honest communication build a stronger foundation for intimacy in your marriage?

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- Are there unresolved issues that need to be addressed before physical intimacy can genuinely restore peace?
- How can you and your spouse prioritize emotional connection before seeking physical reconciliation?

In any marriage, conflicts are inevitable, and while sex can be a powerful tool for reconnection, it is essential to first address the heart of the issue through honest communication. In the letter of James, we find the counsel to “be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry” (James 1:19). This wisdom invites couples to prioritize patience and understanding, fostering peace from the inside out. When partners truly listen to each other’s concerns, they lay a foundation for deeper reconciliation that goes beyond the physical. This attentive listening creates an environment where each partner feels heard, valued, and understood, ultimately strengthening the emotional bond before any physical reconnection occurs.

Physical intimacy (sex), while significant, should not be used to bypass necessary conversations. Pope Francis, speaks about the transformative role of dialogue in marriage, noting that “dialogue is essential for experiencing, expressing and fostering love in marriage and family life.”³⁷ Through dialogue, couples navigate their differences, voice their feelings, and gain insight into each other’s perspectives. This process is the cornerstone of a lasting reconciliation. When intimacy follows open communication, it becomes a meaningful extension of the emotional connection that has been reestablished, reinforcing the unity that dialogue has helped to build.

Additionally, skipping the step of communication in favor of immediate physical reconciliation can leave unresolved issues beneath

³⁷ Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia: The Joy of Love* (Vatican City: Vatican Press, 2016), paragraph 136.

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the surface, only to resurface later. Honest communication allows couples to address misunderstandings, build trust, and strengthen mutual respect. When partners are willing to invest in these conversations, they create a shared space of safety and understanding where conflicts are resolved constructively. As the Bible teaches in Proverbs 15:1, “A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.” Words spoken with gentleness and understanding are vital to resolving conflicts in a way that brings true peace.

In summary, sex, referred to as physical intimacy can be a beautiful celebration of reconciliation, but it should ideally follow the foundational work of communication. This balanced approach helps couples cultivate a love that is both emotionally and physically fulfilling. By committing to open dialogue, couples can ensure that their connection is renewed and rooted in mutual respect, ultimately enriching both their emotional closeness and their physical bond.

8.2. True intimacy as a fruit of emotional reconnection

- How does emotional reconnection contribute to deeper and more meaningful intimacy?
- What steps can you take to ensure your emotional bond with your spouse remains strong?
- How can mutual respect and understanding pave the way for true intimacy?

Intimacy reaches its most meaningful expression when it follows genuine emotional reconnection. After a couple has worked through their disagreements with compassion, understanding, and patience, sex can now become a powerful expression of unity and forgiveness. Genesis 2:24 speaks to this concept of unity, stating, “A man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.” Here, the Bible illustrates that true intimacy in marriage is not merely

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physical; it is a profound union that embraces the emotional, spiritual, and relational. This oneness is built on trust and understanding, elements that flourish after open and honest communication.

Emotional reconnection brings an added depth to intimacy, transforming it from a mere act into a celebration of renewed unity. When conflicts are resolved thoughtfully, intimacy becomes an embodiment of reconciliation, allowing both partners to feel secure and valued in each other's presence. Intimacy grounded in emotional healing is not a quick fix or a way to ignore unresolved issues. Instead, it is an affirmation of the couple's love and commitment to each other, expressing a deep sense of connection that goes beyond words. This approach strengthens the bond between spouses, allowing them to experience physical closeness that reflects an even deeper emotional solidarity.

African wisdom beautifully captures this concept of gentle unity. The proverb "The house that speaks in whispers stays united" underscores the importance of calm, respectful communication in maintaining harmony. When couples engage in soft, understanding dialogue, they cultivate peace, allowing their intimacy to become a natural expression of their emotional closeness. This peaceful and mutual approach to reconciliation invites true unity within the marriage, reinforcing that intimacy rooted in understanding and empathy has the power to heal and restore.

Ultimately, true intimacy arises as the fruit of a marriage built on open hearts and compassionate communication. When couples invest in understanding one another deeply, their physical connection is transformed into an authentic expression of their emotional and spiritual bond. This approach honors the wholeness of their relationship, bringing joy, peace, and fulfillment into their lives as they live out the biblical call to become "one flesh." In this way, intimacy serves not only as a bridge

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to reconciliation but as a reflection of the profound unity that God intends for marriage.

8.3. Avoiding manipulation and emotional pressures

- Are there instances where intimacy has been used as a tool for manipulation in your marriage?
- How can you and your spouse ensure that intimacy is always a free and loving act?
- What boundaries can you set to prevent emotional or physical coercion in your relationship?

In a loving marriage, intimacy should be an expression of free, mutual love, not a tool for manipulation or pressure. When sex is used purely to bring temporary peace without addressing the underlying conflict, it risks creating a sense of obligation or even bitterness. This approach runs counter to the spirit of true Christian love and mutual respect. Ephesians 5:21 reminds couples to “submit to one another out of reverence for Christ,” highlighting that intimacy within marriage should come from a place of mutual consent, never pressure. For intimacy to be genuine, both partners must feel free to give and receive without hidden motives or expectations, fostering a climate of trust and respect.

The Church also teaches that sexuality in marriage is a gift meant to reflect love, unity, and communion, rather than control. The Catechism of the Catholic Church states, “The acts in marriage by which the intimate and chaste union of the spouses takes place are noble and honorable; the sexual union achieves the twofold end of marriage: the good of the spouses themselves and the transmission of life. This physical intimacy of the spouses becomes then a sign and pledge of

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spiritual communion. ”³⁸. Stressing on the same point, the church continues saying that sexuality, by means of which man and woman give themselves to one another through the acts which are proper and exclusive to spouses, is not something simply biological, but concerns the innermost being of the human person as such. It is realized in a truly human way only if it is an integral part of the love by which a man and woman commit themselves totally to one another until death.”³⁹

In this logic, we can then estimate that intimacy, should be a way of nurturing the relationship, not a method of forcing or resolving conflicts. When it is used as a form of control, it undermines the sanctity of marriage and the dignity of each partner. True peace in marriage requires both partners to feel valued and free, allowing intimacy to arise naturally from a loving relationship rather than as a solution to avoid confrontation.

Using intimacy as a means to bypass deeper issues can erode the foundation of trust and mutual respect within the marriage. When one partner feels pressured into physical closeness without addressing unresolved feelings, the emotional disconnect can deepen. Couples should instead strive to resolve conflicts openly, allowing intimacy to emerge as a reflection of their renewed understanding. This approach aligns with Proverbs 3:3, which calls us to this: “let love and faithfulness never leave you.” When couples embody love and faithfulness, intimacy becomes a fruit of their bond rather than a forced remedy.

³⁸ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed. (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997), sec. 2360.

³⁹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed. (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997), sec. 2361.

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8.4. Reaffirming love through Forgiveness

- How does forgiveness play a role in healing and reaffirming love in your marriage?
- Are there past hurts that need to be addressed and forgiven to strengthen your intimacy?
- How can practicing forgiveness create a safe space for vulnerability and reconnection?

Forgiveness is the essential bridge that brings couples back to genuine intimacy and understanding. Jesus’s teaching in Matthew 6:14–15 reminds us of the importance of forgiveness, stating, “For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.” Forgiveness allows couples to release the burdens of resentment and hurt, making space for a fresh start and renewed connection. When partners forgive one another, they clear away emotional barriers, allowing intimacy to flourish as an authentic expression of renewed love. This practice nurtures trust and raises a stronger, deeper bond.

The Church highlights forgiveness as a cornerstone of marital love, essential for building a lasting union. St. John Paul II affirms that “the mutual gift of self, even to the sacrifice of one’s own life, is the unique content of the marriage covenant.”⁴⁰ This mutual gift is made possible through forgiveness, which allows each spouse to recommit to the other without reservation. When intimacy follows genuine forgiveness, it transforms into a reaffirmation of the couple’s love, deepening their connection both emotionally and spiritually. It is through forgiveness that spouses can rediscover the beauty of their commitment, remembering that love is a continuous act of grace.

⁴⁰ John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio* (Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on the Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World), November 22, 1981, Vatican, paragraph 22.

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Forgiveness in marriage is a transformative act that requires humility, empathy, and compassion. Just as Christ forgives us and calls us to forgive others, so too should spouses approach each other with hearts open to reconciliation. This journey of forgiveness enables them to see past mistakes, focusing instead on the love that unites them. Proverbs 10:12 says, “Hatred stirs up conflict, but love covers over all wrongs.” When couples forgive, they choose love over division, building a strong foundation for their relationship to thrive.

Truly speaking, forgiveness brings a powerful sense of healing to marriage, allowing intimacy to emerge as a reflection of reconciliation and renewal. By reaffirming love through forgiveness, couples strengthen their bond and remind each other of their shared commitment to unconditional love. This process enriches the relationship, allowing physical closeness to be a true celebration of the grace and unity that forgiveness brings into the marriage.

8.5. Intimacy as a celebration of renewed love

- How can physical intimacy serve as a joyful celebration of reconciliation and unity in your marriage?
- What specific actions or gestures can you take to show your spouse that he/she is deeply loved and valued?
- How can you maintain intimacy as a continuous expression of your love and commitment?

When intimacy follows honest communication and reconciliation becomes a powerful celebration of renewed unity between spouses. It reflects a deep emotional and spiritual connection built on understanding and forgiveness, rather than serving as a quick fix to avoid confronting issues. Colossians 3:14 reminds us to “put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.” This verse highlights that true peace and harmony in marriage are grounded in love and understanding.

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When intimacy arises from this place of mutual trust, it strengthens the marital bond, reinforcing the commitment both partners share.

Using intimacy as a shortcut to bypass underlying issues can lead to unresolved tension, leaving both partners feeling emotionally unfulfilled. Physical connection alone cannot replace the genuine reconciliation that comes from open dialogue and a willingness to address each other's needs and concerns. When couples treat intimacy as a celebration of their emotional unity, they cultivate a bond that enriches every aspect of their relationship. This authentic connection supports a deeper level of trust, creating a marriage where both partners feel safe, valued, and cherished.

African wisdom offers insight into this harmony, as expressed in the proverb, “When there is no enemy within, the enemies outside cannot harm you.” This saying emphasizes that inner peace—achieved through understanding, compassion, and reconciliation—protects the marriage from external challenges. Intimacy that follows this inner harmony is no longer just a physical act but a joyful reaffirmation of the couple's love. It becomes a space where both partners celebrate their unity, free from the emotional conflicts that can divide them.

Intimacy that follows reconciliation transforms into a meaningful expression of love, rooted in mutual respect and trust. By prioritizing honest communication and resolving underlying issues, couples can ensure that their physical connection reflects a true celebration of their bond. This approach brings harmony and fulfillment into the marriage, allowing intimacy to be a shared experience of joy and gratitude for the love they have nurtured together.

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CHAPTER 9: HANDLING IN-LAWS IN MARRIAGE

In any marriage, the relationship between the couple and their in-laws plays a crucial role in shaping the dynamics of the household. While family support is valuable, in-laws who become too involved in the couple's personal matters can create unintended tensions. This session focuses on the dangers of in-laws being on the front line in marriage, highlighting how issues such as boundary violations, loyalty conflicts, unsolicited advice, and emotional pressure can strain the relationship between spouses. By exploring these challenges, couples will learn the importance of setting healthy boundaries, balancing family expectations, and maintaining unity within their marriage. Ultimately, fostering a respectful, harmonious relationship with in-laws can strengthen the marital bond while preserving personal space and autonomy.



9.1. Boundaries and Personal Space

- How can establishing healthy boundaries with in-laws strengthen your marriage?
- Are there areas in your marriage where external influence has created tension? How can you address this?
- How do you communicate your need for personal space to your in-laws with love and respect?

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Setting healthy boundaries is essential for preserving the sanctity of marriage, particularly when it comes to relationships with in-laws. Boundaries ensure that the couple's decisions and personal life remain respected, preventing external family members from influencing their choices in ways that may create tension. The Bible emphasizes the importance of the marital bond in Genesis 2:24, stating, "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh." This scripture highlights that marriage establishes a new family unit, distinct from the extended family, where the couple's relationship must be prioritized. By setting clear boundaries with in-laws, couples can protect their unity and foster a sense of independence in their decision-making processes.

Boundaries also contribute to mutual respect, not only between the couple but also between in-laws and the new family unit. The Church encourages the preservation of harmony and respect in family life, as seen in *Familiaris Consortio*, where St. John Paul II emphasizes the importance of family relationships built on love and understanding, without overstepping the couple's autonomy. St. John Paul II states that "Love and respect must be freely shown, in the firm hope that unity will be maintained"⁴¹. By establishing boundaries, couples prevent well-meaning family members from crossing lines that may lead to conflicts or undue influence over important decisions. Respect for these boundaries ensures that in-laws can support the couple in a healthy way, without intruding upon their roles as spouses and decision-makers.

Furthermore, setting boundaries fosters the growth of the couple's relationship by allowing them to resolve their challenges together. In Ephesians 5:31-33, St. Paul emphasizes the profound unity

⁴¹ John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio* (Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on the Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World), November 22, 1981, Vatican, paragraph 77.

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and mutual love between husband and wife, calling them to love one another as Christ loves the Church:

“For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.’ This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church. However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.”

In the same way, boundaries create a space where couples can nurture this love, without interference from external family dynamics. By addressing issues within their marriage directly and independently, couples can develop stronger communication and deeper emotional bonds, leading to a more resilient and spiritually enriched relationship.

9.2. Loyalty Conflicts

- Have there been moments where loyalty conflicts between your spouse and in-laws caused misunderstandings?
- How can you ensure that your loyalty to your spouse remains a priority while still honoring your in-laws?
- What steps can you take to address loyalty conflicts without creating division in the family?

Loyalty conflicts often arise when in-laws become too involved in the affairs of a marriage, creating a tension that forces a spouse to choose between their partner and their family. This divided loyalty can lead to feelings of betrayal, resentment, and emotional strain within the marriage. Scripture warns of the dangers of divided loyalties, with Matthew 6:24 stating, "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be loyal to the one and despise the other." Though this passage addresses the spiritual relationship with God, its principle can be applied to the marital bond. A spouse should

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prioritize their partner without undermining the love and respect they hold for their parents. Without clear boundaries, loyalty conflicts can weaken the foundation of trust and unity that marriage is built on.

In our African cultures, a family often extends beyond the nuclear unit, with strong ties between extended family members. While this is a source of strength and support, African theologians like remind couples to be vigilant in avoiding allowing extended familial ties to suffocate the growth and maturity of the marital bond. Laurenti Magesa, in his book *African Religion: The Moral Traditions of Abundant Life*, emphasizes the importance of maintaining a balance between marital autonomy and extended family ties. He cautions that while extended familial relationships are integral to African culture, couples must be vigilant to prevent these ties from overwhelming their marital bond. Magesa underscores that the marital union is a sacred relationship requiring autonomy and protection from external pressures, including those from family. This perspective is detailed in Chapter 5, "Marriage and Family," where he discusses the dynamics between individual couples and their extended families.⁴²

When one spouse feels torn between pleasing their parents and supporting their partner, it can create a situation where the marriage is undermined by outside influences, preventing the couple from fully embracing their shared life together.

There is therefore a need for spouses to prioritize marriage while maintaining respect for their extended family relationships. *Familiaris Consortio* teaches that marriage is a communion of persons where the spouses give themselves entirely to one another:

⁴² Laurenti Magesa, *African Religion: The Moral Traditions of Abundant Life* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997).

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The first communion is the one which is established and which develops between husband and wife: by virtue of the covenant of married life, the man and woman "are no longer two but one flesh" and they are called to grow continually in their communion through day-to-day fidelity to their marriage promise of total mutual self-giving.⁴³

This communion must be safeguarded, and although familial ties are important, they must not threaten the unity of the couple. Couples can show love and respect to their in-laws without allowing them to interfere in marital decisions. Balancing these relationships requires grace, communication, and the ability to establish boundaries that protect the marriage from loyalty conflicts, ensuring that spouses stand united while preserving harmony with their extended families.

9.3. Unsolicited Advice and Criticism

- How do you currently handle unsolicited advice or criticism from your in-laws?
- What strategies can you use to politely set boundaries while maintaining respect?
- How can you and your spouse support each other when dealing with critical comments from family members?

Unsolicited advice involves receiving information, advice, input, or suggestions from others you have not requested. That's why they are qualified as unsolicited. Such advices and criticism from in-laws can be detrimental to a couple's sense of autonomy and confidence in managing their own lives. When in-laws frequently offer opinions on how the couple should handle their finances, parenting, or other personal matters, it can foster feelings of inadequacy, particularly if the couple is still

⁴³ John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio* (Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on the Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World), November 22, 1981, Vatican, 19.

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learning how to navigate marriage. This undermines the biblical principle of a married couple forming a new and independent unit. In Matthew 19:5-6, it is written, “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. So they are no longer two, but one flesh.” This unity implies that decisions should be made by the couple together, without excessive interference from external family members.

Constant unsolicited advice strain communication between partners, as one spouse may feel defensive while the other may feel caught between loyalties. When in-laws overstep their role by offering excessive advice, it can become difficult for the couple to learn how to function together as a cohesive unit, potentially leading to tension and misunderstanding between them.

To manage unsolicited input, couples need to establish and assert boundaries with love and respect. The Church, in *Familiaris Consortio*, encourages couples to maintain open lines of communication, not only with each other but also with the society⁴⁴. In the mentioned society, we do find what we call extended families. The communication in marriage should reinforce the couple's independence and allow them to make decisions together. By politely but firmly addressing unsolicited advice, couples can preserve both their autonomy and their relationship with their in-laws. It is important for spouses to support each other in asserting these boundaries so that they can protect their relationship while still maintaining a respectful and loving connection with their families.

⁴⁴ John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio* (Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on the Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World), November 22, 1981, Vatican, paragraph 45.

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9.4. Differing Family Values and Traditions

- How do your family values and traditions differ from those of your in-laws, and how have these differences impacted your marriage?
- What strategies can you and your spouse use to blend family traditions in a way that honors both sides?
- How can you navigate cultural or value-based conflicts while preserving family harmony?

Let's break for a minutes as we reflect about this question: "How can couples navigate the tension that arises when in-laws impose their own family values and traditions, especially when those values clash with the couple's own beliefs and practices?"

Every family has its own set of values shaped by culture, religion, and upbringing, which can often clash with those of the newly formed family unit. In Genesis 2:24, the Bible states, "a man shall leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh." This verse highlights that marriage involves creating a new family with its own values, separate from the parents. Each partner comes from a different family background, often with distinct traditions, beliefs, and, in some cases, even languages. They come together to form a new family that must be built on shared values and dreams, unique to their relationship. This new family will have its own beliefs, goals, and practices, which may not always align with those of their extended families. While the influence of in-laws is usually well-intentioned, it is crucial for the couple to assert their independence and establish their own traditions that reflect their shared values, rather than merely adopting those of their respective families.

In *Summa Theologica*, St Thomas Aquinas elaborates on prudence as the virtue of right reason applied to action. Specifically, he

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states that prudence involves deliberation and foresight, which are crucial for maintaining peace and harmony in relationships⁴⁵. Similarly, when dealing with differing values, the couple must exercise prudence and understanding, discussing and agreeing on which family traditions are meaningful to them and which might not align with their shared beliefs. Balancing the expectations from both families requires communication and respect, acknowledging that marriage, while enriched by tradition, should not be dictated by it. Couples should work together to create a family life that reflects their personal values while honoring their cultural heritage.

In *Familiaris Consortio*, St. John Paul II emphasizes that while family traditions and values play a crucial role in shaping a couple's identity, the couple must have the freedom to decide how to integrate these values into their own lives. He explains that “the love that animates the interpersonal relationships of the different members of the family constitutes the interior strength that shapes and animates the family communion and community.”⁴⁶ However, when in-laws insist on their traditions taking precedence, it can lead to friction that undermines the couple's ability to make independent decisions. Compromise and empathy are essential in these situations, as both spouses must feel heard and supported while navigating differing family expectations. By focusing on their shared beliefs and respecting both families' heritages, couples can create a unique, blended family identity without jeopardizing the strength and unity of their marriage.

⁴⁵ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, II-II, q. 47.

⁴⁶ John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio* (Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on the Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World), November 22, 1981, Vatican, paragraph 21.

9.5. Emotional Manipulation

- Have you or your spouse experienced emotional manipulation from in-laws? How did it affect your relationship?
- What boundaries can you establish to prevent emotional manipulation without causing unnecessary conflict?
- How can you approach emotionally charged situations with empathy while protecting your marriage?

Emotional manipulation, or pressure from in-laws, creates an unhealthy dynamic where the couple feels torn between loyalty to their parents and loyalty to each other. In many cases, this manipulation manifests as guilt-tripping, undue criticism, or subtle attempts to control the couple's decisions by playing on their emotions. The African proverb saying, “*He who marries a woman marries her family,*” reflects the reality that extended family relationships can deeply influence marriage dynamics. However, the Bible speaks to the importance of leaving behind parental control and forming a new bond between spouses. In Ephesians 5:31, we read, “For this reason, a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.” This unity must be protected against external pressures, including emotional manipulation, which can erode trust and disrupt the couple's decision-making process.

Recognizing manipulative behaviors and addressing them respectfully is critical to maintaining a strong marital bond. African theologian Laurenti Magesa, in *African Religion: The Moral Traditions of Abundant Life*, reminds couples to be vigilant against allowing familial influence to suffocate the growth and maturity of their marital bond⁴⁷. Couples must learn to identify when emotional manipulation is

⁴⁷ Laurenti Magesa, in *African Religion: The Moral Traditions of Abundant Life* (1988)

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being used, whether it's through veiled threats, guilt, or excessive demands for time and attention. A well-known African proverb says, "When two elephants fight, it is the grass that suffers," illustrating the potential damage to a marriage when outside forces create conflict. In such situations, couples must stand firm together, ensuring that external influences do not weaken their commitment to each other.

While it is important to resist manipulation, maintaining respect for one's parents and in-laws is equally crucial. Openness and understanding between couples and their extended families is well encouraged. The goal should not be to sever family ties but to establish clear boundaries that preserve the couple's autonomy while fostering healthy relationships with both families. This involves honest communication, mutual support, and the confidence to assert the couple's decisions without giving in to manipulation.

CHAPTER 10: FINANCE MANAGEMENT IN MARRIAGE

Marriage is a sacred union where two individuals bring together their unique backgrounds, habits, and dreams. Among the many aspects of this partnership, financial management plays a critical role in ensuring harmony and stability. In African culture, where communal living and shared responsibilities are highly valued, financial decisions often extend beyond the couple to include family and community obligations. In this chapter we want to present some practical strategies for handling finances in marriage, enriched with biblical insights, African wisdom, Church teachings, and psychological principles.



10.1. Honest Communication as the cornerstone of financial harmony in marriage

- How comfortable are you and your spouse in discussing your financial situation openly?
- Have misunderstandings about finances ever caused conflict in your marriage? How can you address this?
- How can you foster a habit of regular and transparent financial discussions with your partner?

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Open and honest communication is the cornerstone of financial harmony in marriage. Couples must regularly discuss their incomes, expenses, debts, and financial goals to ensure transparency and alignment in their financial approach. This transparency builds trust, allowing both partners to understand their shared financial reality and work together effectively. Proverbs 15:22 reminds us that “Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed.” When couples communicate openly, they become mutual advisers, avoiding misunderstandings and making informed financial decisions.

Communication is not just about sharing information; it is about fostering mutual respect and understanding. In the context of finances, this means listening to each other’s concerns, priorities, and dreams. For example, one partner might value saving for a home, while the other prioritizes family vacations. Without communication, these differing goals could lead to frustration or conflict. By discussing financial plans regularly, couples can align their priorities and create a united vision for the future.

Our ancestors in Africa used to say this: “When the right hand washes the left, both become clean.” This wisdom underscores the importance of mutual support and cooperation in marriage, particularly in financial matters. Just as the hands work together to achieve cleanliness, couples must work together to maintain financial clarity and harmony. Open dialogue allows both partners to contribute meaningfully to the financial well-being of the household, ensuring that neither feels excluded or overwhelmed.

The teachings of the Catholic Church also emphasize the importance of communication in fostering love and unity. This, we find in *Amoris Laetitia*, where Pope Francis, highlights that:

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*“Dialogue is essential for experiencing, expressing and fostering love in marriage and family life. Yet it can only be the fruit of a long and demanding apprenticeship. Men and women, young people and adults, communicate differently. They speak different languages and they act in different ways. Our way of asking and responding to questions, the tone we use, our timing and any number of other factors condition how well we communicate. We need to develop certain attitudes that express love and encourage authentic dialogue”.*⁴⁸

It’s important to note that in marriage, financial discussions are a critical aspect of this dialogue, as they help couples navigate one of the most challenging areas of married life. By engaging in honest and respectful conversations about money, couples not only build trust but also strengthen their emotional connection. A number of psychologists like Dr. John Gottman stress this value of open communication in reducing conflict and building intimacy. Gottman’s research shows that couples who communicate openly about sensitive topics, including finances, are more likely to feel secure and supported in their relationships⁴⁹.

Open communication about finances is a powerful tool that fosters trust, unity, and cooperation in marriage. By embracing this practice, couples can navigate financial challenges with clarity and confidence, ensuring a harmonious and lasting relationship.

⁴⁸ Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia: The Joy of Love* (Vatican City: Vatican Press, 2016), paragraph 136.

⁴⁹ John Gottman and Nan Silver, *The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work* (New York: Crown Publishers, Three Rivers Press, 1999), p. 20-40.

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10.2. Set Joint Financial Goals

- What are your shared financial goals as a couple, and how aligned are you on achieving them?
- How do your personal financial priorities complement or conflict with your spouse's?
- What steps can you take to ensure your financial goals reflect both your aspirations and shared vision?

Setting shared financial goals is essential for creating a unified vision of the future in marriage. Goals such as saving for a home, planning for children's education, or preparing for retirement provide direction and purpose, fostering collaboration between partners. In the bible we do find this question asked by Amos 3:3, "Do two walk together unless they have agreed to do so?" This biblical wisdom underlines the importance of mutual agreement in moving forward. When couples set and agree on financial goals, they ensure that their efforts are aligned, strengthening their bond and working toward a shared future.

John Gottman discusses the importance of shared meaning in a marriage. He explains that the objects and practices that surround a couple often symbolize their shared values and beliefs. For example, religious icons such as a crucifix might signify shared faith, while personalized symbols—like a framed picture of their dream home—represent mutual aspirations.⁵⁰ Financial goals, such as saving for a house or planning for retirement, can serve as intangible but powerful symbols of a couple's commitment to building a future together.

Setting financial goals is more than just creating a roadmap for practical needs; it is about fostering a sense of partnership and accountability. Dr. Gottman highlights that creating shared meaning

⁵⁰ John Gottman and Nan Silver, *The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work* (New York: Crown Publishers, Three Rivers Press, 1999), p. 257.

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through such goals reinforces intimacy and trust, as it gives both partners a sense of ownership in their journey. For example, budgeting for family vacations or saving for children's education reflects not only financial prudence but also the shared value of family togetherness.

Think of financial goals as a roadmap for your marital journey. Just as travelers need a clear itinerary to reach their destination, couples need a shared plan to navigate the financial challenges of life. Setting joint goals ensures clarity and commitment, helping both partners stay motivated and focused on their priorities. This alignment creates a sense of purpose and ensures that each partner feels equally invested in their future together.

One African proverb states, "If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together." This reflects the power of partnership and shared effort, reminding couples that working together yields lasting and meaningful results. By setting financial goals jointly, couples not only share responsibilities but also celebrate successes together, deepening their connection.

Pope Francis reinforces the importance of collaboration in marriage in *Amoris Laetitia*, encouraging couples to find common ground in family decisions, including finances. He emphasizes that marriage is a unique friendship marked by mutual love, which "acquires an all-encompassing character only within the conjugal union... sharing everything in constant mutual respect."⁵¹ This principle extends to shared financial goals, which promote harmony and unity within the marriage. By agreeing on these goals, couples align their visions and ensure that their financial journey reflects mutual respect and shared aspirations. As the Second Vatican Council affirmed, such collaboration

⁵¹ Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia: The Joy of Love* (Vatican City: Vatican Press, 2016), paragraph 125.

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leads to “free and mutual self-giving, experienced in tenderness and action, and permeating their entire lives.”⁵²

Setting joint financial goals transforms individual ambitions into a shared vision, creating a sense of partnership and unity. With biblical principles, psychological insights, and cultural wisdom as guides, couples can create a financial roadmap that strengthens their relationship and secures their future.

10.3. Create a Budget

- How does budgeting currently factor into your financial management as a couple?
- Are there areas of your spending that need adjustment to align with your financial goals?
- How can creating a budget together strengthen your teamwork and accountability as a couple?

A budget is an essential tool for managing money effectively within a marriage. It allows couples to track their income, control expenses, and allocate resources for savings and investments. This practice helps prevent financial uncertainty and ensures that both partners are aligned in their financial planning. As Luke 14:28-30 teaches, “Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Won’t you first sit down and estimate the cost to see if you have enough money to complete it?” a budget functions as the design for your financial future, enabling wise planning and avoiding unnecessary stress or surprises.

In *Amoris Laetitia*, Pope Francis emphasizes the importance of “dialogue and planning”⁵³ in managing family life. A budget exemplifies

⁵² Idem.

⁵³ Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia: The Joy of Love* (Vatican City: Vatican Press, 2016), paragraph 225.

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this principle by fostering open communication and transparency between spouses. Through the process of budgeting, couples discuss their financial priorities and work together to allocate resources effectively. This shared effort not only ensures practical financial management but also strengthens the bond between partners by encouraging collaboration and mutual respect.

Moreover, Pope Francis highlights that couples who have learned to plan effectively can also share practical suggestions that enhance their family life beyond finances. These include planning free time together, moments of recreation with their children, different ways of celebrating important events, and shared opportunities for spiritual growth.⁵⁴ A budget supports these goals by ensuring that resources are allocated for meaningful activities that nurture relationships and strengthen family bonds.

By integrating financial planning with broader family priorities, couples create an environment where both practical and emotional needs are met. This holistic approach to budgeting aligns with the values of love, unity, and mutual respect, fostering a deeper connection between spouses while ensuring the well-being of their family. Creating a budget is parallel to constructing a solid foundation for your marriage. Just as a building relies on its foundation for stability, a budget provides structure and clarity for your financial decisions. It helps reduce uncertainty and ensures both partners are aware of how money is being spent, which fosters trust and prevents potential conflicts. By aligning your financial actions with your shared goals, a budget helps couples stay focused on their priorities and achieve long-term success together.

In the African wisdom, there is a proverb that says: “One finger cannot kill a louse.” This saying, shows the value of partnership and

⁵⁴ Idem

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teamwork. A budget embodies this wisdom by requiring both partners to contribute to financial planning. When couples work together, they can identify areas for savings, prioritize investments, and avoid financial pitfalls, ensuring a stronger financial future for their family.

Psychological research underscores the significance of budgeting in mitigating financial stress within marriages. It has been noticed that couples who collaboratively establish budgets tend to experience fewer monetary conflicts and a heightened sense of security in their relationships. By clearly defining income and expenses, partners eliminate ambiguity, fostering a shared sense of accomplishment. This cooperative approach enhances harmony and promotes a healthier relational dynamic.

For instance, a study published in the *Journal of Financial Therapy* found that couples engaging in joint financial planning reported improved communication and reduced financial disagreements. The research highlighted that shared budgeting practices contribute to a unified financial vision, thereby strengthening the marital bond.⁵⁵ Additionally, the American Psychologists Britt, Huston, and Durband, support that “of the sources of couple conflict, money consistently ranks at the top of the list.”⁵⁶ Dew & Stewart also continue in the same logic saying that the economic pressure—or perceived ability to meet daily

⁵⁵ Springer Nature Link, "Financial Concerns, Relationship Happiness, and Financial Management Behaviors: A Moderating," *Journal of Family and Economic Issues* 44 (2023): 325–341.

⁵⁶ S. L. Britt, S. J. Huston, and D. B. Durband, "The Determinants of Money Arguments Between Spouses," *Journal of Financial Therapy* 1, no. 1 (2010): 41–59, <https://doi.org/10.4148/jft.v1i1.253>.

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financial needs, particularly among younger and less educated couples—could be one source of increased financial conflict for couples.⁵⁷

These insights underscore the importance of collaborative financial management in fostering a stable and fulfilling marital relationship. In few words, we can hence support that creating a budget is not just about managing money; it is a process that embodies unity, dialogue, and shared purpose in a marriage. Grounded in biblical wisdom, Church teachings, and practical insights, a budget serves as a powerful tool for fostering financial stability and emotional connection between spouses. By committing to this practice, couples can build a very good foundation for their marriage and manage their financial journey with confidence and unity.

10.4. Decide on Joint and Separate Accounts

- Do you prefer joint or separate accounts, and why? How does your spouse feel about this?
- How do your financial arrangements promote mutual respect and trust in your marriage?
- What strategies can you implement to balance financial independence with shared responsibility?

Couples must thoughtfully decide how to manage their finances—whether through joint accounts, separate accounts, or a combination of both. There is no universal solution; the key is finding an arrangement that suits the unique dynamics of each relationship. St Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians 13:4-5 reminds us that “Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. ⁵ It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking.” Financial arrangements

⁵⁷ J. P. Dew and R. Stewart, "A Financial Issue, a Relationship Issue, or Both? Examining the Predictors of Marital Financial Conflict," *Journal of Financial Therapy* 3, no. 1 (2012): 43–61, <https://doi.org/10.4148/jft.v3i1.1605>.

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should reflect mutual respect, compromise, and the shared goal of unity in marriage, rather than emphasizing individual preferences.

Joint accounts foster a sense of unity by consolidating income and expenses. This approach simplifies expense tracking and promotes transparency, ensuring that both partners are aware of financial inflows and outflows. It reflects a shared commitment to managing household finances together, reinforcing trust and collaboration. On the other hand, separate accounts can provide financial independence, which can be particularly beneficial when partners have different spending habits or income levels. Separate accounts allow each partner to retain a sense of autonomy while still contributing to the household. There is also a shared account that can be made for joint expenses such as rent, utilities, and groceries, alongside individual accounts. This system maintains transparency for household responsibilities while respecting personal preferences and independence.

Dr. Gary Chapman in the *5 Love Languages*, emphasizes that financial decisions, like all aspects of marriage, should be tailored to meet the unique needs of each partner. Some couples may find joint accounts to be a meaningful expression of unity, while others value the independence of separate accounts. This decision should be rooted in mutual understanding and respect.⁵⁸ Emphasizing the same issue about accounts, Dr. John Gottman, in *The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work*, highlights that effective communication is the cornerstone of financial harmony. Open discussions about financial arrangements prevent misunderstandings and foster a sense of partnership and accountability.⁵⁹ Another scholar who approached the same question is Dr. Harriet Lerner. In *The Dance of Anger*, she explores

⁵⁸ Gary Chapman, *The 5 Love Languages: The Secret to Love That Lasts* (Chicago: Northfield Publishing, 1992), 65–70.

⁵⁹ John Gottman and Nan Silver, *The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work* (New York: Crown Publishers, Three Rivers Press, 1999), p. 114-118.

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the dynamics of power and control in relationships. She says that financial independence through separate accounts can sometimes balance power dynamics in a marriage, ensuring that both partners feel equally valued and respected.⁶⁰ The decision on joint and separate accounts should begin with open dialogue. Dr. Sue Johnson, founder of Emotionally Focused Therapy (EFT), emphasizes the importance of creating a safe emotional space for these discussions. Couples should approach this decision with empathy and reassurance, addressing any concerns without judgment.⁶¹

In short, financial arrangements are a reflection of a couple's commitment to unity and respect. Whether through joint accounts, separate accounts, or a combination, the key lies in flexibility, open dialogue, and mutual trust. By making thoughtful decisions rooted in love and understanding, couples can create a system that strengthens their bond and aligns with their shared financial goals.

10.5. Manage Debt Wisely

- What is your current approach to managing debt as a couple, and how effective has it been?
- How can you prioritize high-interest debt repayments without neglecting other financial needs?
- How does working together to manage debt foster unity and reduce financial stress in your marriage?

⁶⁰ Harriet Goldhor Lerner, *The Dance of Anger: A Woman's Guide to Changing the Patterns of Intimate Relationships* (New York: Harper & Row, 1985), 91–95.

⁶¹ Sue Johnson, *Hold Me Tight: Seven Conversations for a Lifetime of Love* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2008), 102–105.

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Debt is one of the most significant sources of stress in marriage, often leading to conflict and tension if not managed properly. Couples should approach debt as a shared responsibility, working together to prioritize repayment, avoid unnecessary borrowing, and create a clear and realistic plan to achieve financial freedom. Proverbs 22:7 warns, “The rich rule over the poor, and the borrower is slave to the lender” This biblical wisdom highlights the importance of addressing debt as a pathway to financial stability and independence. Tackling debt together reflects not only financial responsibility but also a commitment to building a secure and prosperous future as partners.

10.5.1. Prioritizing Debt Repayment

Couples should focus on paying off high-interest debts first, such as credit cards or payday loans, which can quickly accumulate and become unmanageable. By creating a structured repayment plan, couples can systematically reduce their financial burden. This approach aligns with practical advice from Dr. Terri Orbuch, who emphasizes that couples who jointly manage debt experience greater relationship satisfaction and reduced financial stress⁶². Open discussions about debt repayment priorities help prevent misunderstandings and foster a sense of teamwork.

10.5.2. Avoiding Unnecessary Borrowing

It is crucial for couples to exercise caution before taking on new debt. Dr. Harriet Lerner, in *The Dance of Anger*, explores how financial disagreements can often stem from unspoken fears or power imbalances. Couples should discuss their financial goals and ensure any borrowing

⁶² Terri Orbuch, *Five Simple Steps to Take Your Marriage from Good to Great* (New York: Delacorte Press, 2011), 89–92.

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aligns with their shared vision for the future.⁶³ Borrowing for non-essential expenses should be avoided to minimize stress and maintain control over finances.

10.5.3. Collaborative Strategies for Debt Management

Addressing debt collaboratively ensures that both partners feel supported and equally invested in the process. According to Dr. John Gottman, working together on financial challenges strengthens trust and partnership. By sharing responsibility for debt repayment, couples can avoid placing blame and instead focus on shared solutions.⁶⁴ This collaboration fosters a sense of accomplishment and unity as couples work toward financial freedom.

10.5.4. Psychological and Practical Insights

Managing debt wisely also requires emotional resilience. In this same logic, Dr. Sue Johnson, emphasizes that emotional security is key to navigating financial stress. In this regards, couples should create a safe space to discuss debt openly, without judgment or criticism, ensuring that both partners feel heard and supported.⁶⁵ Practically, consolidating debts or negotiating lower interest rates can ease the repayment process, reducing strain on the household budget.

When debts are wisely managed, trust and unity are fostered in marriage. By prioritizing repayment, avoiding unnecessary borrowing,

⁶³ Harriet Goldhor Lerner, *The Dance of Anger: A Woman's Guide to Changing the Patterns of Intimate Relationships* (New York: Harper & Row, 1985), 78–81.

⁶⁴ John Gottman and Nan Silver, *The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work* (New York: Crown Publishers, Three Rivers Press, 1999), 110–113.

⁶⁵ Sue Johnson, *Hold Me Tight: Seven Conversations for a Lifetime of Love* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2008), 120–123

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and addressing debt collaboratively, couples can reduce financial stress and work toward a future unburdened by constraints.

CONCLUSION

Marriage is a lifelong journey, one that calls for love, patience, understanding, and a deep reliance on God's grace. Throughout this book, we have explored the many facets of marriage—from handling finances and parenting to navigating cultural differences and resolving conflicts. Each chapter has sought to illuminate the joys and challenges of married life while offering practical tools and spiritual insights to help couples strengthen their bond.

At its core, marriage is a reflection of God's covenant with humanity—a partnership marked by love, sacrifice, and mutual respect. The lessons drawn from biblical principles, cultural wisdom, Church teachings, and modern psychology remind us that no relationship is perfect, but every relationship can grow when nurtured with care and intentionality. As couples, you have the opportunity to create a union that not only sustains you but also inspires others, demonstrating the beauty of God's design for marriage. However, we acknowledge that marriage is a dynamic relationship, constantly evolving as couples face new seasons and challenges. This book has addressed some of the pressing issues that couples encounter, but it is by no means exhaustive. Many questions remain, and many challenges require further exploration.

As you take these lessons into your daily life, we encourage you to reflect on areas that still need attention in your relationship. The journey of marriage is never complete—it is a process of learning, growing, and leaning on God. Know that the struggles you face are not unique, and there is always hope for growth and reconciliation when approached with faith and determination.

The next volume will continue to delve into the complexities of married life, tackling unresolved issues and exploring new dimensions as we provide together deeper clarity to help couples build lasting, joyful

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relationships. As we look forward to the next volume, may God bless you and guide you in building a marriage that reflects His divine love. Stay tuned, and let us continue this journey together.

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