



MARRIAGE & FAMILY

LAYING A FOUNDATION FOR MANY HAPPY YEARS TOGETHER

ASHISH RAICHUR

FOR FREE DISTRIBUTION ONLY

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MARRIAGE & FAMILY

LAYING A FOUNDATION FOR MANY HAPPY YEARS TOGETHER

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

1.	UNDERSTANDING MARRIAGE	1
2.	PREPARING FOR MARRIAGE	10
3.	MAKING THE CHOICE	22
4.	UNDERSTANDING ROLES: HUSBAND AND WIFE	38
5.	ATTITUDES, TEMPERAMENT, AND BEHAVIOR	52
6.	COMMUNICATION IN MARRIAGE	68
7.	MANAGING YOUR HOME	80
8.	SEX AND SEXUALITY	89
9.	BECOMING A TEAM	95
10.	RESOLVING CONFLICTS	104
11.	OVERCOMING LIFE'S CHALLENGES	119
12.	PRESSING FORWARD BY RELEASING THE PAST	130
13.	BOUNDARIES	136
14.	PARENTING PRIMER	147
15.	NURTURING CHILDREN	161
16.	THE FAMILY ALTAR AND INTERCESSION	169
17.	THE FAMILY, THE CHURCH, AND THE KINGDOM	177
18.	WHEN CHILDREN BECOME YOUR FRIENDS	181
19.	ENJOYING THE REST OF THE JOURNEY	185
	BIBLIOGRAPHY	188

INTRODUCTION

Marriage and family are fundamental to our lives and the building blocks of the local church and society. The strength of a local church is often determined by the strength of marriages and families in it. Similarly, the strength of a community, society, or nation is influenced to a large measure by the strength of its smallest unit—the family. When marriages break up and families disintegrate, the strength and fabric of society begins to weaken. The strengthening and securing of marriages and families are therefore vital, both to the local church and the larger community.

There are numerous books that have already been written on various themes in relation to marriage and family. Many of these are comprehensive works on specific areas they address and could be considered classics. Given the availability of such good books, we still embarked on working on this manual, which we felt would address specific areas of need in the church community.

Our objectives in compiling this manual on marriage and family are as follows:

- 1) To compile a work that is simple, practical, and yet, deeply rooted in biblical teaching.
- 2) To compile a work that can be used to help those who are in the early phase of their marriage addressing issues that may be premarital in nature and yet, giving them sufficient understanding to help them build well into their golden years.
- 3) To compile a work that addresses many of the practical issues that affect the building of marriages such as personal attitudes, homemaking, finances, nurturing children, etc., thus making this useful to those who are well past the “first years” and now faced with real, day-to-day challenges of married life.

Our intent is to provide in one place a resource that is comprehensive in nature and yet, something that can be easily read and not too voluminous. Our focus also is to bring out what the Word of God teaches without delving too much into psychology, social science, or other self-help ideas and concepts. Hence, each chapter stays centered around the Word of God.

And most of all, we wish to make this available free of cost so that it can be placed in the hands of many in India and in other developing countries, where people do not have access or means to purchase commercially available literature.

For those starting their journey, we trust that this resource will be a blessing to you and your spouse (or fiancé) to help you lay a foundation for many happy years together. If you have been married for some time now, we trust that this resource will help you rediscover purpose and rekindle passion so that both you and your spouse together can enjoy marriage to the full as God designed it to be.

The contents in this book have come from our personal reading and study of the Scripture along with practical learning in everyday life, and learning from others whose works we have heard or read. Wherever possible, we have attempted to indicate the source from where content has been drawn.

None of us claim to be perfect in our marriages but acknowledge that we are still learners in the wonderful journey called “marriage”, designed by God. We recognize that it takes His abundant grace and wisdom for us to keep growing in our marriages.

Blessings!

The “Compilers”

1

UNDERSTANDING MARRIAGE

We begin this journey first by establishing a biblical understanding of marriage. In the world around us, we find several distorted expressions and views on marriage. Examples of these would include child marriages, marriages of convenience, live-in relationships that do away with marriage, same sex marriages, etc.

The Bible is our standard, and we desire to understand marriage from a biblical perspective and live according to what God's holy Word teaches us.

God—the Designer of marriage

Genesis 2:18-25 (The Message)

¹⁸ God said, “It’s not good for the Man to be alone; I’ll make him a helper, a companion.”

¹⁹ So God formed from the dirt of the ground all the animals of the field and all the birds of the air. He brought them to the Man to see what he would name them. Whatever the Man called each living creature, that was its name.

²⁰ The Man named the cattle, named the birds of the air, named the wild animals; but he didn’t find a suitable companion.

²¹ God put the Man into a deep sleep. As he slept he removed one of his ribs and replaced it with flesh.

²² God then used the rib that he had taken from the Man to make Woman and presented her to the Man.

²³ The Man said, “Finally! Bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh! Name her Woman for she was made from Man.”

²⁴ Therefore a man leaves his father and mother and embraces his wife. They become one flesh.

²⁵ The two of them, the Man and his Wife, were naked, but they felt no shame.

God looked at all that He created and saw that it was good. However, Adam being alone, by himself, was one thing God saw as “not good.” Man needed a companion. He needed a helper (an aid) who would be his counterpart, or completely suited for him (“a help meet for him,” KJV).

If there was only one man, he would be

- lonely,
- isolated, and
- selfish / self-centered.

To eliminate these, God made Eve for Adam. Marriage was designed by God to eliminate the things that were experienced by a man being alone.

Adam recognized Eve as one with whom he could relate to in a way that he could not relate to the rest of creation. He recognized Eve to be one of his own.

In bringing Eve to Adam, God Himself “solemnized” or performed the first “wedding.” Genesis 2:24,25 then gives us the biblical definition of marriage.

Marriage is a man and a woman leaving all other earthly relationships, embracing (cleaving, pursuing) each other, and becoming one person, before God.

“Therefore”—because of what God had done in creating a woman, marriage came into being.

God designed this intimate union between a man and a woman called “marriage”.

When God made the aid or companion who would be man’s counterpart (opposite part, complement part), He made someone who was physically, intellectually, morally suitable, and yet, someone who was very different.

Matthew 19:3-6 (GNT)

³ Some Pharisees came to him and tried to trap him by asking, “Does our Law allow a man to divorce his wife for whatever reason he wishes?”

⁴ Jesus answered, “Haven’t you read the scripture that says that in the beginning the Creator made people male and female?

⁵ And God said, ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and unite with his wife, and the two will become one.’

⁶ So they are no longer two, but one. No human being must separate, then, what God has joined together.”

In the Greek language, the words used are quite strong.

- “To leave” means “to abandon, forsake”
- “To cleave” or “to unite” means “to glue,” “to adhere”
- “Has joined together” literally means “to yoke together”

“... Because God created this organic union of the two sexes, no one should desecrate his art by cutting them apart.” (Matthew 19:6, The Message)

Since God designed marriage, the best Person who can instruct us on building a strong marriage is God Himself.

Here are some biblical perspectives that we must maintain concerning marriage.

Marriage—a “good thing”

Marriage was designed by God. Whatever God designs is good! It was designed to bless us. Marriage was designed to benefit us. It was designed to enrich our individual lives.

Proverbs 18:22

**He who finds a wife finds a good thing,
And obtains favor from the LORD.**

It is true that “ground realities” can sometimes make life very difficult and people tend to look at marriage as a “bad thing” because of the challenges, responsibilities, and struggles husband and wife

go through. However, amidst the worst situation you face, choose to look at your marriage from God's perspective.

Both husband and wife must maintain a biblical confession about their marriage.

Our marriage was designed by God and it is a good thing. It was designed to bless, benefit, and enrich our lives. We need to learn how to do this right and then we will experience God's intended blessing through marriage.

Marriage—an institution to be honored

Hebrews 13:4 (The Message)

Honor marriage, and guard the sacredness of sexual intimacy between wife and husband. God draws a firm line against casual and illicit sex.

Marriage is to be held in reverence and honor. Sexual intimacy must be held as sacred and guarded with purity. Sexual intimacy was intended only between a husband and wife as an expression of their union in marriage.

If you honor God, then you would also honor His Word, His works, and what He has instituted.

We must understand that marriage is not a social institution, but an institution designed and instituted by God. Marriage therefore, deserves a reverence that we would attribute to any work or instruction given to us by God.

Marriage—a solemn covenant (promise)

Malachi 2:13,14 (The Message)

¹³And here's a second offense: You fill the place of worship with your whining and sniveling because you don't get what you want from God.

¹⁴Do you know why? Simple. Because God was there as a witness when you spoke your marriage vows to your young bride, and now you've broken those vows, broken the faith-bond with your vowed companion, your covenant wife.

Marriage, this holy union between a man and woman, is established through vows spoken before God. God is a witness to this solemn promise of faith. Your wife is yours because of the vow (solemn promise) or covenant you made. God does not want us to break those vows.

Marriage is a solemn covenant of a lifetime commitment between one man and one woman.

Marriage is between one man and one woman only

Genesis 2:24,25 (The Message)

²⁴Therefore a man leaves his father and mother and embraces his wife. They become one flesh.

²⁵The two of them, the Man and his Wife, were naked, but they felt no shame.

We must leave to cleave. We understand that both the man and woman have the responsibility to leave all other relationships and then cleave to just the other.

The first responsibility is to establish independence from parents and other earthly relationships. The second responsibility is to establish commitment to the other.

Marriage is meant for one man and one woman. There is what we can consider an “inner circle” and “inner sanctum” that is meant only for the man and the woman bonded together by God. There is no room for anything or anyone else in the inner circle.

When other people, things, etc. crowd into the inner circle, that marriage will experience “stress.”

Sometimes, marriage gets crowded not by people physically moving into the inner circle but through emotional dependence, soulish attachments, inappropriate friendships, etc. that have not been severed or moved to a lower level of importance.

For example, if the husband or wife has an unhealthy dependence on his or her own parents and gives their parents more importance than his or her spouse, the inner circle has been violated and this marriage has gone against God’s design. This is also a “warning” to parents to let go of their son or daughter so that he or she can give undivided attention to his or her own spouse without parental interference.

We realize that many societies have devalued marriage and have approved gay marriages. Gay marriage is an absurdity. There is no such thing as a gay marriage. What the world approves as gay marriage is simply two people living out a homosexual lifestyle. God’s Word teaches us that homosexuality is sin and not normal (Romans 1:26-28). God loves the people but hates the sin. Even so, we still love the people who are trapped in homosexuality or living in gay marriages, but we do not condone their lifestyle. Instead, we reach out to them in love, and work with them to see them set free through the power of Jesus Christ.

Marriage—a union of two

Genesis 2:24 (The Message)

Therefore a man leaves his father and mother and embraces his wife. They become one flesh.

Ephesians 5:31,32 (GNT)

³¹As the scripture says, “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and unite with his wife, and the two will become one.”

³²There is a deep secret truth revealed in this scripture, which I understand as applying to Christ and the church.

To be made “one flesh” means to be made “one properly united person.” It is two persons who have become so united that there appears to be only one person. We are given the union of Christ with His Church as a “comparison” for this union between husband and wife. Christ and His Church are to be so united, He in them and they in Him (John 14:20), so that we walk as He walked (1 John 2:6), and our lives in this world are the same as Christ’s (1 John 4:17) to the point where Jesus said, “He who receives you, receives Me. He who hears you, hears me.” There is perfect oneness and unity between Christ and His Church in the spirit (1 Corinthians 6:17). Husband and wife are to be one in a similar manner. One in spirit. United in one person.

In marriage, a man and woman are made one at the time of their marriage in God’s presence. Then in everyday life, they live this out. Becoming one in everyday life involves an ongoing process of discovering and growing into a place of oneness with each other.

Key words that describe “becoming one” are...

- **Relationship:** To become one, we must build a strong relationship built on love, trust, respect, and understanding.
- **Companionship:** It is developed through good communication, sharing, caring, and time spent with each other.
- **Agreement:** We develop the ability to consider each other’s differing ideas and points of view and arrive at a place that is aligned to God’s purpose and beneficial for the marriage and family.
- **Complementing:** Though being different individuals, we begin to become perfectly “fitted together” supporting and complementing one another.
- **Unity:** We begin to flow together where differences become a reason for closer cooperation and collaboration, and we demonstrate the strength of togetherness.
- **Intimacy (closeness):** This is where each life is like an open book to the other and there is freedom to share everything.

“To become one” is to come into a place of agreement.

“Becoming one” was designed by God and therefore, is achieved through Him alone.

The process of becoming one does not mean that either person loses their individual identity or individuality. Rather, it is a perfect alignment and mutual complementing of two individuals. In such a situation, differences do not divide but rather, they reinforce producing strength through proper balance.

Marriage was designed by God to eliminate the things that would be produced by a man being alone. The oneness we are to experience in marriage will therefore, eliminate the things that would have been produced out of being alone—self-centeredness, isolation, loneliness, weakness, etc.

Self-centered individuality will destroy oneness and companionship.

Also, it is in this context that we emphasize that a believer should not be unequally yoked together with an unbeliever in marriage. Although the following Scripture passages are not specifically speaking about marriage, consider the truth presented in the context of marriage and two lives becoming one.

2 Corinthians 6:14-18

¹⁴ Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness?

¹⁵ And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever?

¹⁶ And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said:

“I will dwell in them
And walk among *them*.
I will be their God,
And they shall be My people.”

¹⁷ Therefore

“Come out from among them

And be separate, says the LORD.
 Do not touch what is unclean,
 And I will receive you.”
¹⁸ “I will be a Father to you,
 And you shall be My sons and daughters,
 Says the LORD Almighty.”

Amos 3:3 (The Message)

Do two people walk hand in hand if they aren’t going to the same place?

Mark 3:25

And if a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand.

There will be several levels of differences between a believer and an unbeliever, which will easily become points of intense conflict affecting the marriage.

Marriage—a journey of love ‘till death do us apart’**Matthew 19:6**

So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate.”

Marriage is for a lifetime. We choose to grow in our marriages until death do us part.

Just a reminder of the marriage vows that are normally spoken by the bride and the groom.

The minister addresses the groom: (Groom), do you take (bride) to be your wife? Will you love her, comfort her, honor and protect her, and forsaking all others, be faithful to her as long as you both shall live?

The groom says: I do.

As the groom places the ring on the bride’s finger, he says: With this ring, I, (groom), take you, (bride) to be my wife, to have, and to hold from this day forward; for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness, and in health, to love and to cherish till death do us part according to God’s holy Word. I give you this ring as a sign of constant faith and abiding love. With my body, I honor you, all that I am, I give to you; this is my solemn vow.

APPLICATION

In the light of what we have covered in this chapter, reflect on the following:

- 1) In what ways would you need to personally change or reinforce within yourself a biblical perspective of marriage?

- 2) What are some popular opinions that are contrary to what the Bible teaches about marriage? We need to recognize the difference and stand firm on what God has instructed us in the Scripture concerning the institution of marriage.

What God has instructed	Popular opinion that is an opposing theology
Marriage—an institution ordained by God	
Marriage—a “good thing”	
Marriage—an institution to be honored	
Marriage—a solemn covenant (promise)	
Marriage is between one man and one woman	
Marriage—a union of two	
Marriage—a journey of love “till death do us part”	

- 3) Why should a husband and wife pursue “becoming one”?

TURNING POINT

Pray over the following for your own life.

- 1) **Accepting God's design for marriage:** Laying aside all other ideas and notions, I choose to embrace God's design for marriage.
- 2) **Marriage is a good thing:** I receive the fact that marriage is a good thing. I cast down destructive thoughts that marriage is a burden, hindrance, mistake, etc. I decide never to speak negatively about my marriage.
- 3) **Marriage is a solemn covenant for a lifetime:** I make a determined choice that I will enter into marriage for as long as the two of us shall live.
- 4) **Marriage is for two and only two:** Have I knowingly or unknowingly allowed others to crowd my marriage? I repent and renounce emotional dependence, soulish attachments, and inappropriate friendships that could affect my marriage. I make a choice to guard and preserve the inner circle.
- 5) **Marriage is the process of becoming one:** Are there things in me or things that I do that could hinder the process of the two becoming one in my marriage, such as wrong attitudes like selfishness, self-centeredness, personal ambitions, stubbornness, dishonor toward my spouse, uncontrolled anger, wrong speech, sinful habits, unfaithfulness, emotional adultery, being insensitive to my spouse's needs, etc.? I confess them to the Lord, renounce, and turn away from such things.

ACTION ITEM

Please pick up at least one good book on marriage and please read through it along with your spouse (or fiancé) and discuss its contents.



2

PREPARING FOR MARRIAGE

Marriage is a union of two individuals. It is the coming together of two different “worlds”—individuals who have different personalities, tastes, perspectives, experiences, expectations, aspirations, and their own individual journey with God. This union of two individuals can either become a beautiful synergy or a massive collision.

If both the individuals are well-prepared and well-equipped, they are doing their best to ensure that their coming together in marriage is going to produce a beautiful synergy so that truly, as the Scripture says, they can grow together to being one.

However, entering marriage lightly, hastily, or even for the wrong reasons (**Example:** Sexual gratification, monetary gain, escape from parents, etc.) is setting the two individuals up for a massive collision. This often can be very devastating.

The ancient Jewish wedding used in the Scripture to paint a beautiful picture of the coming wedding between the Lord Jesus Christ and His Bride—the Church, has an interesting custom. After the arrangement of marriage between the two families and the betrothal ceremony, there was typically a year-long waiting period before the wedding ceremony. The waiting period served two purposes—preparation and testing.

- **Preparation:** The Bride has made herself ready and the Groom went out to prepare a place for his Bride.
- **Testing:** The Bride proved her purity and her devotion to her Groom-to-be, while the Groom demonstrated his readiness for the responsibility of receiving his Bride.

While we are not advocating Jewish traditions or customs, we must understand the value of being well-prepared for marriage and go through the waiting period before entering marriage.

We strongly encourage everyone considering marriage to take at least a year to prepare themselves for marriage.

At All Peoples Church, once two individuals have decided to get married, we make it mandatory that they complete the lessons in this book over a minimum period of three months before All Peoples Church can conduct their wedding. The three-month period is simply a minimum that we recommend. The goal is thorough preparation.

This chapter addresses **seven important areas** that need to be addressed with all seriousness and rigor as part of the preparation for marriage for any couple considering marriage.

1) Becoming the best “you”

John 14:2,3

***² In My Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.
³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.***

Very often, a young man or woman considering marriage focuses on finding the best person, “Mr. Perfect” or “Miss. Perfect.” While working on finding the right person who is best suited for you is important, we must not forget that the best thing you can do as part of your preparation is to become the best “you” for your future spouse, marriage, and family.

The best gift you can bring to your spouse, your marriage, and your future family is yourself. Nothing can substitute that or match up to it.

Although the Lord Jesus Christ died to purchase His Bride—a people redeemed by His own blood, at this time, He is “preparing a place” for His Bride. The Holy Spirit is at work in the Church preparing the Bride for her Groom. Christ will come for a glorious Church, a Church that has been made ready, “*pure and faultless, without spot or wrinkle or any other imperfection*” (Ephesians 5:27, GNT). As the Church is made ready, she calls out with expectation and anticipation, with the Spirit, “*And the Spirit and the bride say, “Come!”* (Revelation 22:17). A key takeaway from this is “preparation” to becoming what we are supposed to be before the wedding.

As part of your preparation for marriage, determine to work on yourself with God’s help. God works in us by His Word and by His Spirit, but He needs us to co-labor with Him to make this happen.

Be the best “you” that you can be spiritually, emotionally, physically, socially, professionally, financially, and in all other ways.

2) Your emotional health

Proverbs 15:13 (The Message)

A cheerful heart brings a smile to your face; a sad heart makes it hard to get through the day.

Proverbs 17:22 (The Message)

A cheerful disposition is good for your health; gloom and doom leave you bone-tired.

It is important to ensure that both individuals coming together in marriage are in good emotional health. Having and maintaining positive emotions, attitudes, and behaviors are important not only for yourself but also for your spouse, your children, and others who are around you.

Marriage is not a cure to the emotional problems you have. In fact, marriage will only expose and aggravate emotional weaknesses. These, in turn, will be detrimental to the marriage relationship. Hence, it is best to identify, face up to, and deal with negative emotions, attitudes, and behaviors before you enter marriage.

Here are some negative or unhealthy emotions, attitudes, and behaviors that must be recognized and addressed before marriage.

- Outbursts of anger
- Depressive and emotionally vacillating as opposed to being cheerful, thankful, and joyful at all times
- Unable to handle stressful situations. We need to have personal strategies that help us manage our emotions during stressful situations.
- Critical and judgmental
- Negativity and pessimism
- Guilt and shame
- Insecurity, inadequacy, lack of self-esteem, or self-worth
- Emotionally dependent on parents or other individual(s)
- Self-centeredness and an unhealthy independence where you are unwilling to discuss, collaborate, work as a team, respect, and yield to another person's ideas
- Jealousy
- Pride
- Authoritative, controlling, demanding, overly assertive where you insist on having things your way
- Manipulative and cunning where you tend to get your way by manipulating people
- Unforgiving and calculative
- Selfish and stingy as opposed to serving, sharing, giving, and caring for others
- Deceptive or secretive
- Suspicious, untrusting

Our emotions affect our actions, reactions, behaviors, and decisions. While all of us face some or many of the negative emotions listed above, we learn how to manage them, temper them, and eliminate or override them, and instead, walk in the right attitudes, emotions, and behavior.

Some of the wrong behaviors that cause the disintegration of a marriage stem from emotional problems that have not been addressed.

A wife does not become a nagging spouse accidentally. Perhaps her husband's behavior(s) has caused her to become one. Or perhaps the wife has emotional issues that need to be addressed.

Proverbs 27:15 (The Message) (same as Proverbs 19:13)
A nagging spouse is like the drip, drip, drip of a leaky faucet;

Proverbs 21:9 (GNT) (same as Proverbs 25:24)
Better to live on the roof than share the house with a nagging wife.

Proverbs 21:19 (GNT)

Better to live out in the desert than with a nagging, complaining wife.

Negative emotions, attitudes, and behaviors need to be addressed, and as individuals, we need to develop Christlike attitudes, a Spirit-controlled temperament, and a Word-governed behavior. More on this in Chapter 5.

In marriage, part of becoming one is recognizing and understanding each other's emotions, attitudes, and behaviors in different situations. Since we are all "wired" and trained differently, we respond differently in similar situations. Learning to understand and respect each other's emotions and responses is important. Learning how to support your spouse as they react or respond to a situation is important.

NOTE

Death and grieving: For those preparing for marriage, if either of you are currently going through a time of grieving following the recent loss of a loved one, then do not rush into marriage but allow time for the one grieving to come to terms with the situation.

3) Personal management**Proverbs 25:28**

**Whoever has no rule over his own spirit
Is like a city broken down, without walls.**

Another important part of personal preparation for marriage is personal management. This has to do with getting "your own house in order"—learning how to manage your own life and life's responsibilities and developing necessary skills to do so. These would include developing skills to manage your career, time, schedule, finances, and developing other basic household skills.

(i) Career

- Do you have a clear sense of what you will be doing professionally? Have you been able to maintain a steady job / profession so that you will be able to provide for your family?
- Will you be taking on a new assignment or changing careers just prior to or after marriage? Discuss these plans openly with your fiancé or spouse to the extent things are known now so that there are no "surprises" later.
- **Working at home:** Will either of you be working from home? Then set guidelines to permit this to happen making it clear what "office" hours are and what "family" hours are.
- **Employment separation:** Will either of you have to relocate or live separately after your marriage due to employment reasons? As a general guideline, we suggest that at no point in your marriage should husband and wife live separately for any reason (employment, vacation, etc.) for a period beyond 3 months at a stretch. Many extra-marital affairs happen simply because this general guideline is not followed. Try to avoid being away from each other immediately after your marriage. Your initial period is important, and it is good to be together to focus on your marriage.

(ii) Finances

- Do you have a basic idea on how to manage your monthly income?
- Can you live within your financial means at this point?
- Are you committed to honoring God with your finances and faithful in giving your tithe and offerings to the local church and to support the work of God's Kingdom?
- Will you be able to move away from the "mine" and "yours" mentality when it comes to finances and toward a more unified approach to money where you are able to share financial details and responsibilities with your spouse?
- What are your financial goals for the road ahead? What standard of living do you expect to maintain? Have you set realistic financial goals and expectations?
- Once married (or if you are already married), who will be primarily responsible for handling money? How will the income be distributed and shared? How will household and other expenses be met?
- **Debt:** Is either of you in debt? If so, how much? How will this debt be paid off? Will the other person have to contribute financially to help pay off the debt after marriage? Debt hinders our ability to live freely, and it can affect everything from our personal relationships to our physical, emotional, and spiritual health.
- **Saving and investing:** Have you understood some basic methods to save and invest for your marriage, family, and future? Have you started doing this?

(iii) Time management

- **Schedule:** Are you able to maintain daily, weekly, monthly, and annual schedules where you manage how and where you invest your time?
- **Daily devotional time:** Are you able to consistently maintain your daily devotional time with God?
- **Keep the Lord's Day:** Commitment to be at the local church every Sunday and schedule all other things around this.
- **Planning and goalsetting:** Are you able to plan, set goals, and work toward those goals?
- **Punctuality and keeping commitments:** Are you able to maintain punctuality for work and other scheduled events, or are you tardy, and habitually late to meetings and scheduled events? Do you commit to doing things and not follow through on your commitments?
- **Maintain balance between work, family, and Christian ministry:** Discuss how you plan to do this together.
- **Planning for family:** Set realistic goals for you and your family. For example, when you would like to have children, when you would like to invest in property, etc.

(iv) Household skills

- Develop basic household skills that are needed for both husband and wife to help take care of the home and family, for example, paying bills on time, cleaning rooms, making the bed, washing dishes, cooking, doing laundry, grocery shopping, shopping for household items.
- In most urban homes today, both husband and wife tend to work professionally. This means that both husband and wife should also share in household responsibilities and the caring of children. Hence, both husband and wife need household skills.

While none of us can be perfect in all these areas, we should at least have some amount of preparation and have things in order before entering marriage.

There are professionals and experts from whom we can learn and get help in specific areas and we should not hesitate to ask for help at any point in time before or after the wedding.

4) Relationship skills

Philippians 2:3-5 (GNT)

³Don't do anything from selfish ambition or from a cheap desire to boast, but be humble toward one another, always considering others better than yourselves.

⁴And look out for one another's interests, not just for your own.

⁵The attitude you should have is the one that Christ Jesus had:

Marriage is a lifelong relationship and hence, requires that we have good skills necessary to establish and develop a healthy relationship with our spouse. Proper verbal and non-verbal communication skills, etiquette, and manners; the ability to be flexible with roles and responsibilities; being considerate, tolerant, patient, kind, gentle, and maintaining proper personal hygiene and cleanliness, all go a long way for developing a healthy relationship with your spouse. Prepare yourself in these areas and continue to develop and improve yourself, and they will help strengthen your marriage relationship.

(i) Communication

- A common reason for frustration in marriages is a breakdown in communication. Communication in a marriage is crucial to its success.
- Understand each other's strengths and weaknesses in this area. How can you improve? How can the other person help you communicate better? What are your likes / dislikes with the other person's way of communicating?
- How will either of you express your anger or dissatisfaction about something in your marriage relationship?
- Do you issue threats and ultimatums to get your way or point across? Understand that you are about to enter into a commitment for a lifetime. Marriage is not an experiment, and divorce is not an option.

(ii) Roles in marriage

- Clearly define and understand each other's roles in marriage. The husband is the head, but the wife is a co-heir and must be heard and involved in decision-making.
- How will responsibility be distributed for various things, for example, to provide for the home, for the spiritual growth of the family, for running of the home, for the bringing up of the children, etc.
- Are you flexible? Are you a team player willing to step in and help your spouse with his or her responsibilities when needed?

(iii) In-law relationships

- Clearly define boundaries in your relationships with each other's family members. The general guideline is to maintain a "healthy distance" with family members. No family member must be allowed to interfere with your marriage and decision-making. This is especially important if either one comes from a home where parent(s) have been key decision-makers and the "umbilical cord" has not been cut yet!
- Will you be living with family members? If so, what guidelines can you set to ensure that others do not intrude (knowingly or unknowingly) into your marriage?

5) Overcoming past abuse, trauma, and negative experiences

Isaiah 43:18,19 (The Message)

¹⁸ “Forget about what’s happened; don’t keep going over old history.

¹⁹ Be alert, be present. I’m about to do something brand-new. It’s bursting out! Don’t you see it? There it is! I’m making a road through the desert, rivers in the badlands.

Life brings with it unexpected and sometimes, unpleasant experiences. Some of these leave us hurt and wounded emotionally and otherwise. God helps us overcome our past. He makes all things new. He brings release from past abuse, trauma, and hurts that have taken place in our lives. However, we must go to Him to be made whole emotionally.

If we do not receive healing for past abuse and trauma, and instead carry these wounds and hurts into the marriage, our spouse and marriage will suffer. Many incorrectly think that getting married will take care of these unresolved issues.

(i) Abuse

- Have you been a victim of emotional or physical abuse? Has this negative experience been dealt with? Are there any hurts, wounds, or behaviors that stem from this abusive experience in your life?
- Understand that no form of abuse—physical, mental, or otherwise is acceptable within your marriage. Make a commitment that under no circumstance will you resolve to abuse your spouse or children.

(ii) Addictions (smoking / alcohol / drugs / gambling, etc.)

Are you bound to any form of addiction, those listed here or any other? You must make a decision to receive freedom and renounce these before you enter into marriage.

(iii) Negative home environments and experiences

- **Infidelity:** Did you see unfaithfulness in your parent's marriage? How did you react to this? You cannot let this happen in your marriage.
- **Separation / Divorce:** Were your parents separated or divorced? Separation and divorce must not be something you anticipate in your marriage. These are last-resort measures in the worst situations and must not be a part of your thought or speech. Refuse to make such statements—"Leave this house now," "Get out of this house," "I will divorce you," or "I will leave and go stay with ... on my own," etc.
- **Incorrect models and learned behaviors:** We usually tend to repeat what we have seen our parents do. The wife tends to behave the way her mother behaved toward her spouse and her children. The husband tends to follow his father's behavior. If these were incorrect models and behavior patterns that were detrimental, then these have to be unlearned. You will intentionally have to unlearn what you have seen earlier and learn biblical and healthy behavior patterns in relating to your spouse and children.
- **Previous relationships:** Have you been emotionally or even sexually involved with one or more people before your wedding? Have you completely broken all forms of contact with these and renounced all emotional affections toward them? Have you brought these sins under the redeeming power of the cross of Jesus Christ? Have you embraced His forgiveness and are you completely free from feelings of guilt and shame? When guilt gets a hold of you, it can make you feel like you are trapped in a tunnel of despair. Feelings of anger or pain often lead to bitterness, and they can keep you from attaining goals, achieving intimacy with others, and finding peace but past trauma or suffering does not have to lead to a lifetime of failure.

6) Sexual purity

Hebrews 13:4 (The Message)

Honor marriage, and guard the sacredness of sexual intimacy between wife and husband. God draws a firm line against casual and illicit sex.

(i) Break free of all sexual addictions (pornography / masturbation / homosexuality / sexually explicit movies, etc.)

- Bring all your sexual appetites in submission to the Lordship of Christ. Keep your soul and body including your sexual passions, drive, and desires pure by the power of His Word and His Spirit.
- All your sexual needs are to be met within your marriage and by your spouse. You must make a commitment not to look elsewhere—to other people or to other things for sexual fulfillment.

(ii) Sexual intimacy

- Once you are married, you must learn to enjoy sex with your spouse as long as both of you are physically able.
- Sex was designed by God for enjoyment and fulfillment. It is a godly thing when performed within the boundaries of marriage. You must learn to give yourself unreservedly to your spouse.
- Do not withhold sex from your spouse and use it as a “weapon” against your spouse.

7) Christian maturity, calling, and ministry**Ephesians 4:12,13 (GNV)****¹²He did this to prepare all God's people for the work of Christian service, in order to build up the body of Christ.****¹³And so we shall all come together to that oneness in our faith and in our knowledge of the Son of God; we shall become mature people, reaching to the very height of Christ's full stature.*****(i) Spiritual growth***

- Marriage brings with it additional responsibilities. Plan how you will ensure your continued spiritual growth after you enter into marriage.
- Also, try to discuss with your fiancé / spouse as to how you will help each other and your children (when they come) grow spiritually.

(ii) Christian calling

- As believers, each one has a place and function in the Body of Christ. Share with the other what you have come to understand as God's calling on your life. How can the other help you fulfill that calling?
- Understand what God's calling is for your fiancé / spouse. How can you help your fiancé / spouse fulfill his / her calling?
- Are there areas of your individual callings that are complementary—where you can work together in doing things for God's Kingdom? This is especially important because together you can do a lot for God's Kingdom. Determine these areas and develop ideas on how you can serve / minister together.

Important

If you are going through this material as part of your premarital preparation, please commit to doing the following:

- 1) Spend quality time studying God's Word and working through the lessons.
- 2) Engage in open, honest, and constructive discussions with your fiancé.
- 3) Bring up any issues / problem areas and discuss them with your fiancé and your premarital counselor / pastor.

- 4) Spend quality time in praying alone and together with your fiancé.
- 5) **Engagement period (courtship):** Set guidelines and boundaries during this stage so that you will conduct yourselves in an honorable way during this period with the primary focus of preparing yourselves the best you can for your marriage.
- 6) **Marital expectations:** Share your expectations of marriage.
- 7) **Preparing for marriage:** Jointly develop a plan on how you will prepare yourselves for marriage.
 - (i) Areas that need to be addressed
 - (ii) Areas where each one needs to grow and hold each other accountable
- 8) We recommend reading one or two good books on “marriage.” Purchase two copies of the same titles and read them. Share and discuss what you have learned at the end of each chapter.
- 9) **Purity boundaries:** Make a commitment that both will maintain purity and stay within boundaries. Godliness is not an option, but a command from the Lord.

APPLICATION

In the light of what we have covered in this chapter, reflect on the following:

Think through your own individual readiness in each of the seven areas of preparation.

Rate yourself on a scale of 1 to 5. 1 being **unprepared** and 5 being **well prepared**.

Identify specific things you think you need to work on as part of your preparation for marriage.

Preparation area	Preparedness rating	Things that need to be worked on
1) Becoming the best “you”		
2) Your emotional health		
3) Personal management		
4) Relationship skills		
5) Overcoming past abuse, trauma, negative experiences		
6) Sexual purity		
7) Christian maturity, calling, and ministry		

TURNING POINT

Pray over the following for your own life.

Ask God to give you the wisdom and understanding that you need to prepare well for your marriage. If there are specific areas where you need God’s healing, deliverance, or where you need to see God’s intervening work in your life, take time to pray, and believe His promises for those areas. Speak and declare your faith in God’s Word concerning those areas.

God will perfect and complete what concerns me in every area of my life. (Psalm 138:8)

*I am God’s handiwork and He is shaping me and making me into what He wants me to be.
(Ephesians 2:10)*

*God who began a good work in me is continuing to do it and will complete what He started.
(Philippians 1:6)*

ACTION ITEM

- 1) Reach out for the help you need.

If you feel you need the help of a professional / expert (**Example:** Financial advisor, skills coach), or a Christian counselor or pastor in any of the seven areas of preparation, do not hesitate to reach out for help. Do this before you get married.

2) Learning to live out of who you are in Christ.

One of the most powerful ways to receive healing, walk in emotional wholeness, build yourself emotionally strong, and overcome emotional challenges is to understand and live out of who you are in Christ. Who you are in Christ is who you really are! This is the truth. This is an established fact. Discovering this truth and learning to walk in this will set you free and make you whole emotionally, completely.

(For a more detailed study, please see the APC book, “**Who We Are in Christ**” available as a FREE download at apcwo.org/books.)

Let this truth fill your heart and mind.

3) We also recommend reading some of the following FREE APC books if you feel there are unresolved emotional issues, and you need help.

- *Ministering Healing & Deliverance* (see Chapter 12 on “Ministering Emotional Healing and Wholeness”)
- *Breaking Personal and Generational Bondages*
- *Laying the Axe to the Root*
- *Living Life Without Strife*

All APC books are available for FREE. You can download FREE PDF versions from apcwo.org/books



3

MAKING THE CHOICE

In this chapter, we consider some practical and biblical guidance on making the choice of a life partner. We realize that the context in which marriage takes place can vary across cultures, people, and regions. Hence, we understand that not everyone will be in a situation where they have the liberty or opportunity to apply all that is presented in this chapter. There could be several parental, familial, societal constraints that prevent one from applying one or more of these guidelines. In such situations, commit things to the Lord and trust Him to work on your behalf in spite of the constraints you may find yourself in. God is always bigger than our circumstances.

Four realms of compatibility

Genesis 2:24 (The Message)

Therefore a man leaves his father and mother and embraces his wife. They become one flesh.

Amos 3:3 (The Message)

Do two people walk hand in hand if they aren't going to the same place?

Mark 3:25

And if a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand.

As we learned in the previous chapter, marriage is a union of two lives—of two different individuals. This union is a union at all three realms—spirit, soul, and body. Marriage is also a place of agreement. Two can only walk together if there is agreement. And hence, one of the important things to look for, as you go about deciding on your life partner, is compatibility in all three realms—spirit, soul, and body. Additionally, you need to ask if there is compatibility in life's calling.

By compatibility, we do not mean being an exact copy of each other. But rather, we mean the ability to be at a place of agreement, the ability to be “yoked together” so that both can walk together in unity and strength for the rest of their lives. The fact is that two individuals are different and you will not be an exact copy of each other. However, despite your differences, are you able to come to a place of understanding, a place where you can see your differences and commonalities as an opportunity to work together, and complement each other?

1) Spiritual compatibility

For marriage, we would like to state that it is not sufficient that both partners considering marriage are believers. While both being believers is necessary, we need to go a step further to ask if both the individuals have similar commitment, passion, and disciplines in their daily walk with God and in their life's calling. Consider a young man and a young woman, both are believers in the Lord, but one is passionate and has been growing steadily in the faith while the other is happy just being regular at

church on Sundays and living a morally upright life during the week. One would like to spend an hour or two in devotion time daily, and not only attend Sunday services but also serve extra time at church on Sundays, be involved in small group meetings, get involved in ministry, etc. While it may not happen in every situation, it is likely that the differences in spiritual passion could become a place of contention. (*Some of you reading this manual may already be married and realize the incompatibility that may exist between you and your spouse in this area. Now that you are married, please do not use this as an excuse to drift apart. Rather, recognize this difference, and patiently and peacefully work at growing together with God's help and wisdom in this area. What we will learn in later chapters in this manual will help toward achieving this.*)

2) Emotional and intellectual compatibility

You also need to look for the ability to connect at the soul (mind, will, emotions, intellect) level. Are you able to relate well emotionally and intellectually? Are there interests and areas where you can share, relate, and enjoy together? Is there a sense of mutual understanding and respect intellectually? Are you able to understand each other's emotions? Of course, this is a lifelong journey, and you will not be able to know everything about the other person at the very beginning. Also, people grow and change over time and we cannot predict these changes. However, there should at least be a starting point, a common ground of emotional and intellectual compatibility to start with, and you can look out for this. (*Some of you reading this manual may already be married and realize the incompatibility that may exist between you and your spouse in this area. Now that you are married, please do not use this as an excuse to drift apart. Rather, recognize this difference, and patiently and peacefully work at growing together with God's help and wisdom in this area. What we will learn in later chapters in this manual will help toward achieving this.*)

3) Physical compatibility

This has to do with being attracted to each other, appreciating and loving each other physically. So, take this into consideration as well. There is nothing wrong in being excited about physical beauty or appearance. However, this must be kept at its rightful place and must not be the only reason you make a decision about wanting to marry someone.

4) Compatibility in life's calling

Another important area of compatibility is in life's calling. What do either of you want to do in life? While we will not know everything about the future, at least, in a general sense, there needs to be compatibility in what each one recognizes as God's calling and is intending to pursue. For example, if one wishes to be involved in the corporate world, intending to settle in a large city while the other feels called to spend most of his / her life serving people in a remote tribe or village somewhere, there definitely is an incompatibility in what they plan on doing for the future. If these two people were to come together in marriage, one of them will have to give up on their "calling," and this may lead to a lot of dissatisfaction resulting in marital conflict. (*Some of you reading this manual, may already be married and realize the incompatibility that may exist between you and your spouse in this area. Now that you are married, please do not use this as an excuse to drift apart. Rather, recognize this difference, and patiently and peacefully work at growing together with God's help and wisdom in this area. What we will learn in later chapters in this manual will help toward achieving this.*)

Watch out for warning signs

Proverbs 4:26

Ponder the path of your feet,
And let all your ways be established.

An important guideline we would like to present when you make the choice is to look out for warning signs. These are indicators that there could be potential problem areas and hence, we recommend that if you do see such signs, understand that these areas are addressed before marriage. Be thoughtful when making your choice and do not let overwhelming emotions blind you to warning signs that may be so obvious.

Here are some things that you need to consider.

- **Signs of immaturity:** Does the person seem mature and ready for the responsibility of marriage and family?
- **Signs of lack of preparation:** Has the person done initial preparatory work in getting ready for marriage? Consider some of the seven areas of preparation we discussed in the previous chapter.
- **Signs of character weaknesses:** Are there serious character weaknesses, for example, addictions, emotional issues, etc. that could be detrimental to a marriage?
- **Signs of parental control:** Are parents too controlling and interfering in the process?
- **Signs of parental dependence:** Is the person still dependent and attached to parents, in which case, he / she may give more importance to parents rather than to the spouse after marriage?
- **Get insight from parents and / or spiritual mentors:** What do your parents or spiritual mentors think about the person you are considering? Do they see any warning signs?

What do you expect? What can you give?

Romans 14:5 (GNT)

Some people think that a certain day is more important than other days, while others think that all days are the same. We each should firmly make up our own minds.

James 1:8

he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

While neither of these two verses of the Scripture are given in the context of marriage per se, they do communicate to us what God lays on us as our responsibility. In matters of personal choice where God has given us the liberty to make our own choices, each one of us must firmly make up our own minds. Be firm about this because being unsure or double-minded causes instability.

So also as you prepare to make the choice of a life partner, you need to be clear about the kind of person you would like and have realistic expectations of your life partner and of your marriage and family.

Take some time to ponder and perhaps write down your thoughts on the following:

- 1) What kind of spouse would you really like? What traits or qualities are important to you? What traits or qualities are nice but not critical?

- 2) What are your expectations of marriage? What kind of a home and family would you like to see built? Keep this practical and realistic.

Remember, marriage is not all about what you can get. It involves what you can give or bring into your marriage.

Take time to reflect and perhaps write down your thoughts on the following:

- 3) What traits and qualities can I bring into my marriage for the benefit of my spouse?

- 4) How can I help toward building my marriage and building a home and family that I would like to see as described in my response to question 2?

When answering these questions, be simple, honest, practical, and real. Don't delve into an imaginary fantasy world. Thinking through these questions will help bring clarity about the kind of person you need to marry. It helps you have some sort of a framework that will help you in the decision-making process.

Is there an “appointed one-and-only”?

Genesis 24:1-15 (GNT)

¹Abraham was now very old, and the LORD had blessed him in everything he did.

²He said to his oldest servant, who was in charge of all that he had, “Place your hand between my thighs and make a vow.

³I want you to make a vow in the name of the LORD, the God of heaven and earth, that you will not choose a wife for my son from the people here in Canaan.

⁴You must go back to the country where I was born and get a wife for my son Isaac from among my relatives.”

⁵But the servant asked, “What if the young woman will not leave home to come with me to this land? Shall I send your son back to the land you came from?”

⁶Abraham answered, “Make sure that you don’t send my son back there!

⁷The LORD, the God of heaven, brought me from the home of my father and from the land of my relatives, and he solemnly promised me that he would give this land to my descendants. He will send his angel before you, so that you can get a wife there for my son.

⁸If the young woman is not willing to come with you, you will be free from this promise. But you must not under any circumstances take my son back there.”

⁹So the servant put his hand between the thighs of Abraham, his master, and made a vow to do what Abraham had asked.

¹⁰The servant, who was in charge of Abraham’s property, took ten of his master’s camels and went to the city where Nahor had lived in northern Mesopotamia.

¹¹When he arrived, he made the camels kneel down at the well outside the city. It was late afternoon, the time when women came out to get water.

¹²He prayed, “LORD, God of my master Abraham, give me success today and keep your promise to my master.

¹³Here I am at the well where the young women of the city will be coming to get water.

¹⁴I will say to one of them, ‘Please, lower your jar and let me have a drink.’ If she says, ‘Drink, and I will also bring water for your camels,’ may she be the one that you have chosen for your servant Isaac. If this happens, I will know that you have kept your promise to my master.”

¹⁵Before he had finished praying, Rebecca arrived with a water jar on her shoulder. She was the daughter of Bethuel, who was the son of Abraham’s brother Nahor and his wife Milcah.

The story of Abraham’s servant being sent to find a bride for Isaac, Abraham’s son, is an inspiring one, especially for those who are single and in the process of looking for a life partner. However, one of the common questions that arises after reading what God did is whether there is the one and only one “appointed person” that God has ordained to be a life partner for an individual.

Here are some insights we would like to point out in this account.

Rebecca could have said, “No”

We see this in Genesis 24:8, where Abraham’s servant recognizes the possibility that any woman whom he went to ask to be a bride for Isaac could refuse to come.

Abraham’s servant went out in search of a bride and depended on God’s guidance. He had his way of discerning God’s guidance.

Genesis 24: 21,26,27 (GNT)

²¹The man kept watching her in silence, to see if the LORD had given him success.

²⁶Then the man knelt down and worshiped the LORD.

²⁷ He said, “Praise the LORD, the God of my master Abraham, who has faithfully kept his promise to my master. The LORD has led me straight to my master’s relatives.”

Abraham’s servant did not sit at home and expect the bride to be “delivered” at his front door. Rather, he went out to search for a bride. Also, he had his practical way of recognizing God’s guidance. For us as New Testament believers, we understand that the Holy Spirit guides us in our spirits (Romans 8:14,16), and God has called us to use our renewed minds to prove what is good, acceptable, and pleasing to Him (Romans 12:2).

Abraham’s servant did not override the choice and will of the bride’s family.

Genesis 24:49-51 (GNT)

⁴⁹ Now, if you intend to fulfill your responsibility toward my master and treat him fairly, please tell me; if not, say so, and I will decide what to do.”

⁵⁰ Laban and Bethuel answered, “Since this matter comes from the LORD, it is not for us to make a decision.

⁵¹ Here is Rebecca; take her and go. Let her become the wife of your master’s son, as the LORD himself has said.”

In as much as Abraham’s servant recognized God’s hand of guidance, when he met Rebecca’s family, he did not use “spiritual force” or “spiritual manipulation” to compel them to send Rebecca to become Isaac’s wife. He let them make the decision and was still willing to take “No” as an answer if that was what they chose to say.

Ultimately it was Rebecca’s decision

Genesis 24:54-59 (GNT)

⁵⁴ Then Abraham’s servant and the men with him ate and drank, and spent the night there. When they got up in the morning, he said, “Let me go back to my master.”

⁵⁵ But Rebecca’s brother and her mother said, “Let her stay with us a week or ten days, and then she may go.”

⁵⁶ But he said, “Don’t make us stay. The LORD has made my journey a success; let me go back to my master.”

⁵⁷ They answered, “Let’s call her and find out what she has to say.”

⁵⁸ So they called Rebecca and asked, “Do you want to go with this man?”

“Yes,” she answered.

⁵⁹ So they let Rebecca and her old family servant go with Abraham’s servant and his men.

Ultimately, Rebecca had to make her choice. She had to decide if she wanted to say “Yes” or “No” to Isaac. It is true that in some way, she must have had the peace and confidence to say “Yes.” In a way that Rebecca would have understood, God had readied her heart to do so. Rebecca herself had to recognize this and respond.

There are many others whom God has led differently

From the understanding we currently have, we believe that there are many people who can potentially become your partner in life. With God’s guidance and using the wisdom and understanding He gives, you must make a choice of marrying one person. We do not believe that there is only one person appointed for your life as *the one* to be married to, and that if you miss that person, your chances of marriage are ruined forever. What we believe is that once you have made the choice of marrying the person you think God is guiding you to and who you discern as being the best (most suitable) for you, both of you will now have to work together to build a great marriage.

So, in doing the seeking, you are not going about trying to find the “appointed” one for your life, but the person you recognize as the one God is guiding you to and that you determine would be the best (most suitable) for you. The one that you choose with God’s guidance then becomes the one for you—your spouse for the rest of your life.

Real-life scenario

Consider a young man John who really likes a particular young lady, Mary. Both are strong believers, mature in the Lord, and actively serving in their local church. John seems to have had many indications that Mary is the “appointed one” for him and no one else. He has had dreams, visions, prophetic words, confirmations from the Scriptures, encouragement from his peers, spiritual mentors, and even the support of his parents about marrying Mary. However, Mary seems unresponsive and does not feel the same toward John, and states that she has had no direction from the Lord. Eventually, Mary marries some other believing young man. John also moves on and later marries another young lady who is a believer. Does this mean that they missed God? Does this mean that they cannot have happy marriages?

We must understand that the decision for marriage must be mutual. If God is speaking to one person, then He will also lead the other person in a similar manner. We cannot force what one person seems to be hearing from God over another person’s will.

Even if we assume Mary did not hear God (or assume John was seriously mistaken), at the end, God honors our decision in marriage. Eventually, both have married in the Lord and before God. God will bless both marriages. Both can have great marriages because marriage is not just about finding the “right” person but about what you do on a day-to-day basis to build your marriage and grow in your relationship as husband and wife. Both can still fulfill God’s purposes for their lives along with the person each married as they follow God.

Doing the seeking

Matthew 7:7-11 (GNT)

⁷“Ask, and you will receive; seek, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened to you.

⁸For everyone who asks will receive, and anyone who seeks will find, and the door will be opened to those who knock.

⁹Would any of you who are fathers give your son a stone when he asks for bread?

¹⁰Or would you give him a snake when he asks for a fish?

¹¹As bad as you are, you know how to give good things to your children. How much more, then, will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him!

Proverbs 18:22 (The Message)

Find a good spouse, you find a good life - and even more: the favor of God!

Proverbs 19:14 (GNT)

A man can inherit a house and money from his parents, but only the LORD can give him a sensible wife.

There is no perfect man, and no perfect woman. So, looking for a spouse is not about finding “Mr. Perfect” or “Miss. Perfect”. They do not exist!

With what you have learned in this chapter, go about prayerfully doing the asking, seeking, and knocking while always trusting God that He will guide you to the right (most suitable) person for your life. Remember that the “right” person God guides you to is not a “perfect” person. Like the rest of us, he or she is still a “work in progress”. But what this chapter has given you are some guidelines with which you can do the seeking.

Depending on where you live, there are several channels through which you can search for a life partner. Begin in your own local church community. As you engage and interact in your local church community, prayerfully consider if there are people who may be suitable for you. Get the help of your local spiritual mentors and leaders as well in the search. You can also look wider, and connect with other local churches, or other matrimonial facilitators such as websites, special programs, and events, etc. There is nothing wrong in asking, seeking, and knocking on all available doors that you have access to. God works in many ways in directing and guiding our paths. Be open to how He desires to do it in your life and, when and whom He guides you to.

Making the decision on the person you are going to marry is a combination of the leading of God’s Spirit, following the instructions in God’s Word, and using sound judgment, wisdom, and godly counsel. If you will do your best to tap into all these, you can rest assured that you will be able to make the right decision.

Discerning God’s guidance

Ephesians 5:17

Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is.

Romans 12:2

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

Colossians 1:9 (GNT)

For this reason we have always prayed for you, ever since we heard about you. We ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will, with all the wisdom and understanding that his Spirit gives.

The Scripture teaches us to know, understand, and walk in accordance with God’s will, guidance, or direction for our lives. The renewed mind can prove (reason through, understand) what is the good, acceptable, and perfect will of God. It also takes the wisdom and understanding given by the Holy Spirit to know God’s will. So, discerning God’s guidance involves both listening to His Holy Spirit and using our renewed minds, that is, thinking through on things using the wisdom, understanding, and revelation He has given to us in His Word and by His Spirit.

As you seek to discern God’s guidance about whom you should marry, we recommend taking the following into consideration.

- Does this person have the traits and qualities that are important to me?
- Is there alignment and compatibility in all the four realms—spiritual, emotional and intellectual, physical, and life’s calling?

- Is the person ready (prepared) or can this be addressed properly?
- Are there any warning signs and have these been adequately addressed?
- Is there a witness (leading) in your spirit given by the Holy Spirit? Do you have God's peace about this?
- Are there any other external indicators where you have seen God's hand at work in guiding you to this?
- Is it mutual? Are both ready to say "Yes" to each other?
- Is there support and approval from parents? We realize that this may not be possible in all situations, especially in cases where parents may not agree to the importance that you give to personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.
- Is there support and approval from spiritual elders who oversee your life?

While you are in waiting

Romans 12:12 (GNT)

Let your hope keep you joyful, be patient in your troubles, and pray at all times.

Hebrews 11:1 (GNT)

To have faith is to be sure of the things we hope for, to be certain of the things we cannot see.

For some of us, the search for a life partner may take some time. You are waiting and looking out for a life partner. This time of waiting till you find your life partner is not always easy. Continue in hope. Do not let go even if the search takes longer than what others may experience. Stay joyful. You can be joyful because of the hope you have in your heart. This hope also propels faith in God. Keep faith alive in your heart that God will help you find your life partner.

Continue to do what you need to be doing in this season of life. Stay busy with what God has given you to do. Spend your time developing yourself, becoming the right person, and growing in God's call and purpose for your life. Don't be passive or sit idly around saying that you are "waiting." Waiting time is not a time of inactivity, but a time to be engaged in what God has placed in your hands to do now while you look forward to what He has promised.

Marriage is more than the wedding

The wedding ceremony is the big event where you and your fiancé will come before God and people to exchange your vows and be united in marriage. It is the start of your married life. While there can be a lot of excitement, planning, preparation, and work that needs to go into the details of having the wedding, don't forget that marriage is more than the wedding. In all the busyness of preparing for the wedding, don't forget to take time to prepare yourself for the marriage—the life that the two of you will live together for many years after the wedding.

Marriage is more than finding the right person

Proverbs 24:3,4 (GNT)

³ Homes are built on the foundation of wisdom and understanding.

⁴ Where there is knowledge, the rooms are furnished with valuable, beautiful things.

Once you have decided on the person you are going to marry, take time to prepare yourselves for your marriage. Take time and effort to do this. Don't rush into marriage. Study this manual on "*Marriage and Family*" together as part of your preparation. Pay special attention to things presented in Chapter 2 on preparing for marriage. Take time to discuss and talk through the seven areas that have been listed in that chapter. Get all the help you need from pastors, counselors, and mentors as you prepare yourself. Be prepared emotionally. Be prepared financially. Discuss long-term goals. Discuss major changes that you may make after marriage. Discuss relationship with parents on both sides. Discuss your involvement in Christian ministry. Discuss potential problem areas—personal habits, preferences, lifestyle standards, and how you plan to handle these.

The engagement period

We realize that in some cases, there can be a duration of several months from the time you formally decide to marry a particular person to the wedding day. In some cases, there can be a formal engagement while in other cases, only a decision is made and approved by parents, but no formal engagement happens. Either way, here are some important guidelines during this period from the time you have made your choice to the day of your wedding.

No sex before marriage! Just say "No!"

1 Thessalonians 4:3-5 (The Message)

³ God wants you to live a pure life. Keep yourselves from sexual promiscuity.

⁴ Learn to appreciate and give dignity to your body,

⁵ not abusing it, as is so common among those who know nothing of God.

Hebrews 13:4 (The Message)

Honor marriage, and guard the sacredness of sexual intimacy between wife and husband. God draws a firm line against casual and illicit sex.

Refrain from all forms of sexual encounters during this time. You will have the rest of your life, after marriage, to enjoy each other! So, you can wait.

Slogans from Josh McDowell Ministries

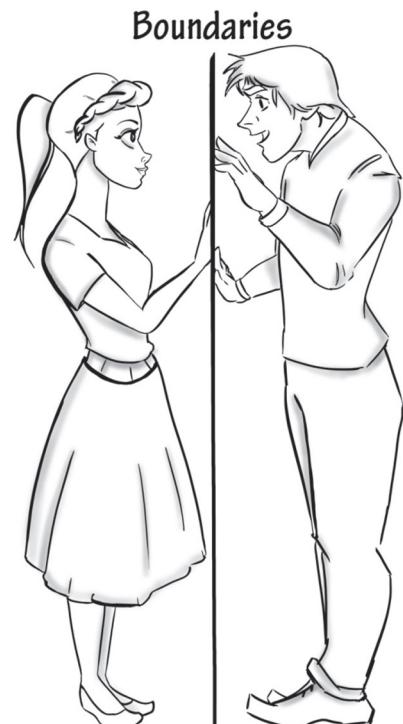
I make lifelong decisions with my head, not my hormones.

Anybody can, but a man can wait.

Higher standards for those in ministry

James 3:1 (GNT)

My friends, not many of you should become teachers. As you know, we teachers will be judged with greater strictness than others.



1 Timothy 4:12 (GNT)

Do not let anyone look down on you because you are young, but be an example for the believers in your speech, your conduct, your love, faith, and purity.

For young people who are serving in their local church or ministry, we encourage you to hold yourself to higher and stricter standards of behavior and conduct. Your lives must be examples. Be role models for those who are younger than you. They are watching and learning from what they see in you.

Until you are married, you are NOT married

Don't "play" being married. You do not have a right to each other's time, money, body, future, etc. until you do get married. Don't make your premarital relationship, even if you are engaged, a crutch. Stand on your own feet. Spend time with other people. Don't let your entire life revolve around the relationship. When you see warning signs, don't be afraid to address them. If things are not properly resolved, seriously consider breaking off the engagement. It is better to go through breaking up a premarital relationship (engagement) than to live through a bad marriage for the rest of your life.

Some signs that a break-up of an engagement may be necessary.

- The other person becomes controlling, manipulative, abusive, etc.
- One person becomes emotionally dependent on the other.
- Consistently failing in carrying responsibility, maintaining a job, keeping commitments, etc.
- Big differences become visible, for example, in spiritual maturity, passion for God, etc.
- Character problems, for example, addictions, etc.
- Disapproval of parents / spiritual mentors.

Am I called to be single?

We have been exploring the truth about marriage and God's instructions for something He designed. It is right for you to consider that God wants you to be married and have a blessed marriage and home. This is part of the Genesis Commission given to the entire human race in Genesis 1 when God spoke over Adam and Eve and said, "*Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth...*" (Genesis 1:28). However, we also understand that, in some cases, marriage may not be the path one takes in life.

We share a few insights presented in the Scripture concerning singleness.

Singleness could be a choice you make for Kingdom purposes**Matthew 19:11,12 (The Message)**

¹¹ But Jesus said, "Not everyone is mature enough to live a married life. It requires a certain aptitude and grace. Marriage isn't for everyone.

¹² Some, from birth seemingly, never give marriage a thought. Others never get asked - or accepted. And some decide not to get married for kingdom reasons. But if you're capable of growing into the largeness of marriage, do it."

While there could be various reasons why a person may choose to remain single, the Lord Jesus pointed out that some may decide not to get married for Kingdom reasons. Maybe they would choose to devote the entirety of their time to pursuing a specific calling for God's Kingdom and hence, choose to remain single.

Singleness is a gift—you are empowered for a life of celibacy

1 Corinthians 7:7-9,28 (The Message)

⁷ Sometimes I wish everyone were single like me - a simpler life in many ways! But celibacy is not for everyone any more than marriage is. God gives the gift of the single life to some, the gift of the married life to others.

⁸ I do, though, tell the unmarried and widows that singleness might well be the best thing for them, as it has been for me.

⁹ But if they can't manage their desires and emotions, they should by all means go ahead and get married. The difficulties of marriage are preferable by far to a sexually tortured life as a single.

²⁸ But there's certainly no sin in getting married, whether you're a virgin or not. All I am saying is that when you marry, you take on additional stress in an already stressful time, and I want to spare you if possible.

The apostle Paul remained single. However, he does explain that the ability to do so is a gift, an empowering that comes from God. And yet, not everyone is empowered to be celibate and hence, there is no sin in getting married.

Singleness is a choice you make to focus on spiritual pursuits

1 Corinthians 7:32-38 (The Message)

³² I want you to live as free of complications as possible. When you're unmarried, you're free to concentrate on simply pleasing the Master.

³³ Marriage involves you in all the nuts and bolts of domestic life and in wanting to please your spouse,

³⁴ leading to so many more demands on your attention. The time and energy that married people spend on caring for and nurturing each other, the unmarried can spend in becoming whole and holy instruments of God.

³⁵ I'm trying to be helpful and make it as easy as possible for you, not make things harder. All I want is for you to be able to develop a way of life in which you can spend plenty of time together with the Master without a lot of distractions.

³⁶ If a man has a woman friend to whom he is loyal but never intended to marry, having decided to serve God as a "single," and then changes his mind, deciding he should marry her, he should go ahead and marry. It's no sin; it's not even a "step down" from celibacy, as some say.

³⁷ On the other hand, if a man is comfortable in his decision for a single life in service to God and it's entirely his own conviction and not imposed on him by others, he ought to stick with it.

³⁸ Marriage is spiritually and morally right and not inferior to singleness in any way, although as I indicated earlier, because of the times we live in, I do have pastoral reasons for encouraging singleness.

Marriage brings with it a host of family responsibilities. Hence, some may be convinced to choose a life of singleness to focus their attention on pursuing God and living a life of service to God. Marriage although has its responsibilities, is in no way an inferior way of life compared to singleness.

How can you tell if you are called to a life of singleness? Ask yourself these questions.

- Do you feel you are empowered and have the strength to remain single for the rest of your life?

- Do you feel that there is a specific Kingdom calling for which, if you did get married, you would not be able to pursue freely while doing what is needed to nurture a marriage and family?
- Do you feel that you are in a place where you would want to devote all your available time and energies to pursuing a life of service to God, and any desire for a wife and family can be laid aside?

If in all honesty and with all confidence you can answer with a “Yes” to all these questions, then it is likely that you could consider a life of singleness. Otherwise, proceed to praying about getting married and do the best to prepare yourself for a married life.

APPLICATION

In the light of what we have covered in this chapter, reflect on the following:

If you have not done so already, take some time to write your thoughts down thoughtfully and prayerfully for the following questions. Listen to the leading of the Holy Spirit as you write.

- 1) What kind of spouse would you really like? What traits or qualities are important to you? What traits or qualities are nice but not critical?

- 2) What are your expectations of marriage? What kind of a home and family would you like to see built? Keep this practical and realistic.

- 3) What traits and qualities can I bring into my marriage for the benefit of my spouse?

- 4) How can I help toward building my marriage and building a home and family that I would like to see as described in my response to question 2?

- 5) What do I sense is God's direction for my life in the near future? What kind of things would I be doing professionally and for the church / ministry in the next five years?

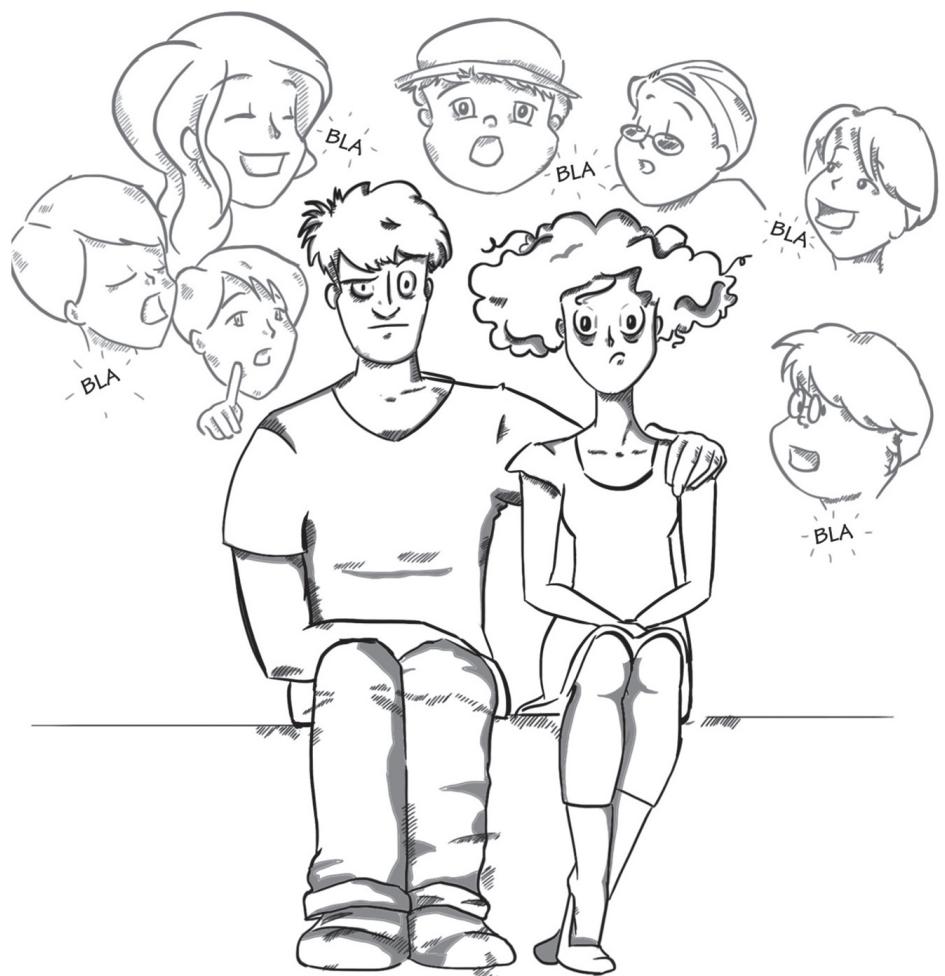
TURNING POINT

Pray over the following for your own life.

- 1) Pray and in faith, ask God for a spouse that you really would like and someone with whom you can fulfill God's purposes for both your lives. Remember the promise of the Lord Jesus, "*For this reason I tell you: When you pray and ask for something, believe that you have received it, and you will be given whatever you ask for*" (Mark 11:24, GNT).
- 2) According to Mark 11:23, now speak your faith. Release your faith with words that you speak and call forth the kind of spouse you desire and call forth the fulfilling of God's purposes for your life.

ACTION ITEM

If you have not done so already, and you feel that the time is right, start doing the "asking, seeking, and knocking." Prepare a short profile of yourself. Share that with your pastor / local church, other spiritual leaders who could help you. You can consider using Christian matrimonial sites where you can post your profile.



4

UNDERSTANDING ROLES: HUSBAND AND WIFE

In this chapter, we seek to examine a few Scripture passages that provide specific instructions on the role of husband and wife toward each other, toward their marriage and family. These are instructions given to us by God, the Designer of marriage and family. Our objective in this chapter is to understand what God expects of husband and wife, and learn to celebrate our different roles.

Equals, joint-heirs, and interdependent

1 Peter 3:7 (The Message)

The same goes for you husbands: Be good husbands to your wives. Honor them, delight in them. As women they lack some of your advantages. But in the new life of God's grace, you're equals. Treat your wives, then, as equals so your prayers don't run aground.

We begin first by establishing the truth that in marriage, husband and wife are equals and joint heirs before God in all spiritual gifts and graces that He releases. This means that neither the husband nor wife should consider themselves in better standing before God because of their spirituality or some spiritual status he / she thinks that he / she has earned. Not only are we to look at each other as equals but must also treat each other as equals.

1 Corinthians 11:11,12 (GNT)

¹¹ In our life in the Lord, however, woman is not independent of man, nor is man independent of woman.

¹² For as woman was made from man, in the same way man is born of woman; and it is God who brings everything into existence.

We have listed just two verses (vv.11,12) from a larger passage in 1 Corinthians 11 dealing with head-covering for women and God's government, which we will not discuss here. However, verses 11 and 12 summarize the essence of what is being stated. These two verses emphasize the fact that God has designed husband and wife to be interdependent. This means that "*Neither man nor woman can go it alone or claim priority*" (v.11, The Message). One of the joys of marriage is the willingness or opportunity to draw from each other's strengths and support each other's weaknesses.

A challenge for men

The idea of being co-equal, joint-heirs, and being interdependent is challenging for many men who come from social or cultural backgrounds where in some subtle way, men are trained to consider women as inferior. Some men may consider it a matter of pride not to seek help, assistance, and support from a woman, in this case, their own wife. However, as men, we must change our thinking and align ourselves to what the Scriptures teach us.

A divine parallel: Christ and His Church

Ephesians 5:21-33 (The Message)

²¹ Out of respect for Christ, be courteously reverent to one another.

²² Wives, understand and support your husbands in ways that show your support for Christ.

²³ The husband provides leadership to his wife the way Christ does to his church, not by domineering but by cherishing.

²⁴ So just as the church submits to Christ as he exercises such leadership, wives should likewise submit to their husbands.

²⁵ Husbands, go all out in your love for your wives, exactly as Christ did for the church - a love marked by giving, not getting.

²⁶ Christ's love makes the church whole. His words evoke her beauty. Everything he does and says is designed to bring the best out of her,

²⁷ dressing her in dazzling white silk, radiant with holiness.

²⁸ And that is how husbands ought to love their wives. They're really doing themselves a favor - since they're already "one" in marriage.

²⁹ No one abuses his own body, does he? No, he feeds and pampers it. That's how Christ treats us, the church,

³⁰ since we are part of his body.

³¹ And this is why a man leaves father and mother and cherishes his wife. No longer two, they become "one flesh."

³² This is a huge mystery, and I don't pretend to understand it all. What is clearest to me is the way Christ treats the church.

³³ And this provides a good picture of how each husband is to treat his wife, loving himself in loving her, and how each wife is to honor her husband.

Colossians 3:18,19 (GNT)

¹⁸ Wives, submit yourselves to your husbands, for that is what you should do as Christians.

¹⁹ Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them.

1 Peter 3:1-9 (The Message)

¹ The same goes for you wives: Be good wives to your husbands, responsive to their needs. There are husbands who, indifferent as they are to any words about God, will be captivated

² by your life of holy beauty.

³ What matters is not your outer appearance - the styling of your hair, the jewelry you wear, the cut of your clothes -
⁴ but your inner disposition.

⁵ The holy women of old were beautiful before God that way, and were good, loyal wives to their husbands.

⁶ Sarah, for instance, taking care of Abraham, would address him as "my dear husband." You'll be true daughters of Sarah if you do the same, unanxious and unintimidated.

⁷ The same goes for you husbands: Be good husbands to your wives. Honor them, delight in them. As women they lack some of your advantages. But in the new life of God's grace, you're equals. Treat your wives, then, as equals so your prayers don't run aground.

⁸ Summing up: Be agreeable, be sympathetic, be loving, be compassionate, be humble.

⁹ That goes for all of you, no exceptions. No retaliation. No sharp-tongued sarcasm. Instead, bless - that's your job, to bless. You'll be a blessing and also get a blessing.

Ephesians 5:21-33 is a powerful passage that describes how husbands and wives ought to relate to one another and sets a high standard when comparing this relationship with Christ and His Church. The passage in 1 Peter 3:1-9 reflects much of what is said in Ephesians 5.

If God has set this standard for us as husbands and wives, then God will also empower us to do

this if we are willing and desiring to do so. “*Because God is always at work in you to make you willing and able to obey his own purpose*” (Philippians 2:13, GNT). So as husbands and wives, we should desire to grow into what God has set as His standards for us, and He will enable us to do so.

Let us summarize as succinctly as possible the key aspects of the role of the husband and that of the wife from these two passages.

Husband's role and responsibility

1) LOVE as Christ loves.

- Love with the God-kind of love (*agape* love), unconditional love, love that loves without expecting anything in return. Love that is faithful, steady, committed, and unwavering.
- 1 Corinthians 13:4-8 describes the characteristics of *agape* love.
- This kind of love leads to sacrificial action involving self-denial.
- This kind of love leads to the building-up and enriching of the wife.

2) NOURISH your wife.

- To nurture, encourage, enable, and empower her to grow so that she can become all that God intends for her.
- Nourish (nurture) by feeding and supplying for her spiritual, emotional, and other needs.

3) CHERISH your wife.

To hold her as a valued gift, a special treasure from God.

- A wife feels cherished when her husband communicates with her.
- A wife feels cherished when there is romance (not just sex) in the relationship.
- A wife feels cherished when her husband is trustworthy.
- A wife feels cherished when her husband makes her load lighter, not heavier.
- A wife feels cherished when her husband sets a godly example in the pursuit of God.

4) LEAD as the head of the marriage.

- Leadership in marriage is based on divine placement, not superior abilities. In God’s government, the husband has been placed as the “head” and authority over the wife to provide loving leadership for the wife and the family.
- Leadership in marriage is based on Christ’s example, not society.
- Leadership involves taking responsibility for the family in providing for the family, meeting needs, decision-making, guiding, etc.

- A husband is called to be a loving leader rather than a dictatorial monarch over his wife. You earn your wife's following by being a man of strong moral character, compassion, and competence.
- The husband being the head or leader does not mean that he is always right. Husbands must walk in humility with the understanding that in decision-making, the wife has an equal say, must take her points of view into consideration, and where her idea is superior or right, the husband must acknowledge and go with that. Hence, the Scriptures teach us all to be submissive to one another (Ephesians 5:21).

5) KNOW your wife.

- Know what pleases her, what displeases her, her strengths, her weaknesses, her preferences, her emotions, her dreams, and her pursuits.

6) HONOR your wife.

- Respect her and celebrate her for who she is and the gifts and grace she carries.

Husband, write one or two practical ways you can do these for your wife.		
LOVE	NOURISH	CHERISH
LEAD	KNOW	HONOR

Wife's role and responsibility

1) LOVE your husband.

- Love is a heart attitude of unconditional acceptance.
 - The word ‘*phileo*’ is used, meaning “to be your husband’s best friend, be a companion suited for him” (Titus 2:4; Genesis 2:20).
 - Accept him as he is—his imperfections, his thoughts, his failures, etc. This acceptance is not based on performance but on his worth as God’s gift to you.
- Love is a sacrificial action demonstrated through your priority, focus, availability, willingness to listen, etc.
- Love is physical responsiveness.

2) SUBMIT to your husband.

- Submitting or yielding to your husband demonstrates support and recognition to his God-

appointed role as “head” over the marriage and family.

- When you support, you complete or complement without competing.
- Submission to your husband means...
 - o You are being obedient to God and to His Word.
 - o You are freeing your husband to take His God-appointed place as the leader by coming under his leadership.
 - o You are empowering your husband to lead by encouraging him through your willing submission.
- Submission to your husband does not mean...
 - o To be inferior
 - o To lose your identity or individuality
 - o Blind obedience, allow yourself to feel used, abused, etc.

3) RESPECT your husband.

- It means to voluntarily lift up another person. (“I honor you”)
- It involves understanding and appreciation. (“I appreciate you”)
 - o Understand and appreciate the weight of his responsibilities.
 - o Understand and appreciate his uniqueness and differences as a man.
- It involves providing the encouragement he needs. (“I believe in you”)
- It involves showing admiration. (“I am proud of you”)

4) HELP your husband by assisting, supporting, and encouraging what he does (Genesis 2:20).

Wife, write down one or two practical ways you can do these for your husband.			
LOVE	SUBMIT	RESPECT	HELP

While we know that none of us are “perfect” as husband or wife, God has given each a role in marriage. He has described how we should conduct ourselves in marriage. Our desire should be to continuously grow into being the kind of spouse God desires us to be despite our own personal limitations and flaws that we began with.

As each spouse develops in fulfilling their role in marriage, the marriage progresses toward oneness. Becoming one will become a possibility!

The Bible gives us the characteristics of the Godkind of love (1 Corinthians 13:4-8,GNT).

This is the kind of love, we are called to walk in.

Think of some practical ways you can express these to your spouse.

	LOVE ...	Some practical ways I could express to my spouse
1.	is patient	
2.	is kind	
3.	is not jealous	
4.	is not arrogant or proud	
5.	is not ill-mannered	
6.	is not selfish	
7.	is not irritable	
8.	does not keep record of wrongs	
9.	is not happy with wrongdoing	
10.	is happy with the truth	
11.	never gives up	
12.	always believes in the best for the other person	
13.	always hopes for the best for the other person	
14.	endures through everything	
15.	never fails	

Real-life scenario on submission

What if the husband is deciding for the family (**Example:** Buying property, career change, relocation etc.), but the wife feels that he is making a wrong decision? The husband is not willing or unable to see the wife's perspective and intends to go ahead with his decision. The decision the husband plans to make is not "scripturally wrong" but seems wrong from a practical standpoint. The wife is very concerned that if the husband were to proceed, the entire family will face serious consequences. Should the wife remain submissive even in a situation like this? How should the wife respond?

We can address this from the spiritual and practical stand points. Spiritually, the wife is instructed to submit to the husband. Submission is to yield. It is an act of HONOR and TRUST. When the wife submits to the husband, she is not only honoring him, but honoring God who has placed the husband in her life and has called the wife to submit to the husband. Also, when the wife submits, she has done what she can, but now she yields to the husband and places her trust in the Lord to keep her family through even if the decision to be made by the husband seems wrong. From a practical standpoint, the wife could gently and lovingly suggest that they both meet and get the advice of an expert in this area where the decision is about to be made. For example, if it is a decision about buying a property, they could meet with a trustworthy and reliable real-estate expert who will be able to give unbiased advice on the matter. Following this, a final decision can be made by the husband.

Responsibilities at home and for the family

The following Scripture passages describe specifically those involved in the local church community and the standards and conduct they must follow. We present these here because these, in some way, apply to all of us, believers, as we may presently or will eventually engage in the life of the local church community in one way or another.

1 Timothy 3:1-13 (GNT)

¹This is a true saying: If a man is eager to be a church leader, he desires an excellent work.

²A church leader must be without fault; he must have only one wife, be sober, self-controlled, and orderly; he must welcome strangers in his home; he must be able to teach;

³he must not be a drunkard or a violent man, but gentle and peaceful; he must not love money;

⁴he must be able to manage his own family well and make his children obey him with all respect.

⁵For if a man does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of the church of God?

⁶He must be mature in the faith, so that he will not swell up with pride and be condemned, as the Devil was.

⁷He should be a man who is respected by the people outside the church, so that he will not be disgraced and fall into the Devil's trap.

⁸Church helpers must also have a good character and be sincere; they must not drink too much wine or be greedy for money;

⁹they should hold to the revealed truth of the faith with a clear conscience.

¹⁰They should be tested first, and then, if they pass the test, they are to serve.

¹¹Their wives also must be of good character and must not gossip; they must be sober and honest in everything.

¹²A church helper must have only one wife, and be able to manage his children and family well.

¹³Those helpers who do their work well win for themselves a good standing and are able to speak boldly about their faith in Christ Jesus.

1 Timothy 5:8 (GNT)

But if any do not take care of their relatives, especially the members of their own family, they have denied the faith and are worse than an unbeliever.

Titus 1:6-9 (GNT)

⁶an elder must be without fault; he must have only one wife, and his children must be believers and not have the reputation of being wild or disobedient.

⁷For since a church leader is in charge of God's work, he should be without fault. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered, or a drunkard or violent or greedy for money.

⁸He must be hospitable and love what is good. He must be self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined.

⁹He must hold firmly to the message which can be trusted and which agrees with the doctrine. In this way he will be able to encourage others with the true teaching and also to show the error of those who are opposed to it.

Titus 2:1-6 (GNT)

¹But you must teach what agrees with sound doctrine.

²Instruct the older men to be sober, sensible, and self-controlled; to be sound in their faith, love, and endurance.

³In the same way instruct the older women to behave as women should who live a holy life. They must not be slanderers or slaves to wine. They must teach what is good,

⁴in order to train the younger women to love their husbands and children,

⁵to be self-controlled and pure, and to be good housewives who submit themselves to their husbands, so that no one will speak evil of the message that comes from God.

⁶In the same way urge the young men to be self-controlled.

We will attempt to capture in a simple tabular form the key points presented in these passages, specifically those that deal with role and responsibilities at home and family.

Husband: Role and responsibilities	Wife: Role and responsibilities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have only one wife • Be sober, self-controlled, and orderly • Must welcome strangers in his home (must be hospitable) • Must not be a drunkard or a violent man, but gentle and peaceful • Manage his own family well • Make his children obey him with all respect • Take care of relatives, especially members of own family • Not be arrogant or quick-tempered, be self-controlled • His children must be believers and not have the reputation of being wild or disobedient 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be of good character and must not gossip • Sober and honest in everything • Love one's own husband and children • Be self-controlled and pure • Be a good housewife, take care of the home • Submit to one's own husband

Enjoying sex

1 Corinthians 7:1-6 (The Message)

¹Now, to deal with the matters you wrote about.

A man does well not to marry.

²But because there is so much immorality, every man should have his own wife, and every woman should have her own husband.

³A man should fulfill his duty as a husband, and a woman should fulfill her duty as a wife, and each should satisfy the other's needs.

⁴A wife is not the master of her own body, but her husband is; in the same way a husband is not the master of his own body, but his wife is.

⁵Do not deny yourselves to each other, unless you first agree to do so for a while in order to spend your time in prayer; but then resume normal marital relations. In this way you will be kept from giving in to Satan's temptation because of your lack of self-control.

⁶I tell you this not as an order, but simply as a permission.

We will cover “Sex and Sexuality” in greater detail in a later chapter. We are presenting this here briefly to point out that part of being married is the joy of sexual union between husband and wife. Part of the role of husband and wife involves sexual intimacy. The Scriptures encourage us to...

- Maintain a balanced and fulfilling sex life (v.2).
- Sex must be enjoyed with mutuality, each seeking to satisfy the other (v.3).
- Sex is an opportunity for husband and wife to enjoy each other's bodies and must not be used to “hold something back” (v.4). Do not use your body as a weapon against your spouse by withholding sex.
- Husband and wife can agree to abstain from sex for a short period of time for prayer and fasting (v.5).
- The devil uses the areas of sexuality as an area of attack and hence, we need to be on guard in this area. Enjoying a fulfilling sex life is one important way to keep husband and wife secure in this area (v.5).

The virtuous woman and her husband

Proverbs 31:10-31 (GNT)

- ¹⁰ How hard it is to find a capable wife! She is worth far more than jewels!
- ¹¹ Her husband puts his confidence in her, and he will never be poor.
- ¹² As long as she lives, she does him good and never harm.
- ¹³ She keeps herself busy making wool and linen cloth.
- ¹⁴ She brings home food from out-of-the-way places, as merchant ships do.
- ¹⁵ She gets up before daylight to prepare food for her family and to tell her servant women what to do.
- ¹⁶ She looks at land and buys it, and with money she has earned she plants a vineyard.
- ¹⁷ She is a hard worker, strong and industrious.
- ¹⁸ She knows the value of everything she makes, and works late into the night.
- ¹⁹ She spins her own thread and weaves her own cloth.
- ²⁰ She is generous to the poor and needy.
- ²¹ She doesn't worry when it snows, because her family has warm clothing.
- ²² She makes bedspreads and wears clothes of fine purple linen.
- ²³ Her husband is well known, one of the leading citizens.
- ²⁴ She makes clothes and belts, and sells them to merchants.
- ²⁵ She is strong and respected and not afraid of the future.
- ²⁶ She speaks with a gentle wisdom.
- ²⁷ She is always busy and looks after her family's needs.
- ²⁸ Her children show their appreciation, and her husband praises her.
- ²⁹ He says, "Many women are good wives, but you are the best of them all."
- ³⁰ Charm is deceptive and beauty disappears, but a woman who honors the LORD should be praised.
- ³¹ Give her credit for all she does. She deserves the respect of everyone.

A lot has been said about the Proverbs 31 wife and most men pray to have such a wife. Surely the description of the wife in Proverbs 31 is that of someone who is truly outstanding. A wife who can take care of her husband, her children, her home, her workers at home, and engages profitably in work outside the home.

It is also important to note the Proverbs 31 husband and what this passage states about him and the children.

- Her husband puts his confidence in her (v.11).
- Her husband is well known, one of the leading citizens (v.23). This means he is doing his part well outside the home.
- Her children show their appreciation (v.28).
- Her husband praises her (v.28) by saying "*Many women are good wives, but you are the best of them all*" (v.29).
- Gives her credit for all she does (v.31).
- She deserves the respect of everyone (v.31).

For my wife to be a Proverbs 31 wife, I will have to be a Proverbs 31 husband.

APPLICATION

In the light of what we have covered in this chapter, reflect on the following:

- 1) Dr. Gary Chapman wrote the book, “*The Five Love Languages*” where he describes five different ways that people could express love, and feel love expressed to them.

How to express love: The Five Love Languages				
WORDS Words of affirmation	GIFTS Receiving gifts	SERVICE Acts of service	TIME Quality time	TOUCH Physical touch
Loving, encouraging, affirming words touch their heart like nothing else	What makes them most loved is receiving a gift they like	Actions speak more than words, what you do for / with them means a lot	Giving the person your undivided attention	Nothing speaks more deeply than appropriate touch
Order of importance for my spouse	Order of importance for my spouse	Order of importance for my spouse	Order of importance for my spouse	Order of importance for my spouse
How can I best express this to my spouse	How can I best express this to my spouse	How can I best express this to my spouse	How can I best express this to my spouse	How can I best express this to my spouse

For more information please read, “*The Five Love Languages*” by Dr. Gary Chapman. (Also see www.5lovelanguages.com)

- 2) The Love Language Quiz

Below is a quiz adapted from Gary Chapman’s book, “*The Five Love Languages*.” It is designed to help you to understand the love language in which you best receive (and give) love. The Love

Language Quiz consists of 30 pairs of statements. Choose ONE statement in each pair—the one that best represents your desire and circle the letter you select. Make sure you're only choosing one!

1)	I like to receive love notes from my spouse. I like to be hugged by my spouse.	A E
2)	I like to spend one-to-one time with my spouse. I feel loved when my spouse gives practical help to me.	B D
3)	I like it when my spouse gives me gifts. I like leisurely visits and long trips with my spouse.	C B
4)	I feel loved when my spouse does things to help me. I feel loved when my spouse touches me.	D E
5)	I feel loved when my spouse puts his arm around me. I feel loved when my spouse surprises me with a gift.	E C
6)	I like to go almost anywhere with my spouse. I like to hold hands with my spouse.	B E
7)	Visible symbols of love (gifts) are very important to me. I feel loved when my spouse tells me he loves me.	C A
8)	I like to sit close to my spouse. I like for my spouse to tell me I am attractive.	E A
9)	I like to spend time with my spouse. I like to receive little gifts from my spouse.	B C
10)	Words of acceptance, especially from my spouse, are important to me. I know my spouse loves me when he helps me.	A D
11)	I like being together and doing things with my spouse. I like it when my spouse speaks kind words to me.	B A
12)	What my spouse does affects me more than what he says. Hugs make me feel connected to and valued by my spouse.	D E
13)	I value praise from my spouse. Small, meaningful gifts from my spouse shows me how much he cares.	A C
14)	I feel close to my spouse when we are talking or doing something together. I feel closer to my spouse when he touches me often.	B E
15)	I like for my spouse to compliment my achievements. I know my spouse loves me when he helps me with something he hates.	A D
16)	I like to be touched as my spouse walks by. I like it when my spouse shows genuine interest in what I am saying.	E B
17)	I feel loved when my spouse helps me with jobs or projects. I really enjoy receiving gifts from my spouse.	D C

18)	I like for my spouse to compliment my appearance. I feel loved when my spouse takes time to understand my feelings.	A B
19)	I feel secure when my spouse is touching me. When my spouse runs errands for me, it makes me feel loved.	E D
20)	I appreciate the many things that my spouse does for me. I like the thoughtful gifts that my spouse makes for me.	D C
21)	I really enjoy the feeling I get when my spouse gives me undivided attention. I really enjoy the feeling I get when my spouse cleans the house for me.	B D
22)	I feel loved when my spouse celebrates my birthday with a gift. I feel loved when my spouse tells me how important I am to him.	C A
23)	I know my spouse is thinking of me when he gives me a gift. I feel loved when my spouse helps with my chores.	C D
24)	I appreciate it when my spouse listens patiently and doesn't interrupt me. I never get tired of receiving gifts from my spouse.	B C
25)	I like knowing my spouse is concerned enough to help with my daily tasks. I enjoy taking trips with my spouse no matter where we go.	D B
26)	I enjoy kissing and cuddling with my spouse. I enjoy surprise gifts from my spouse.	E C
27)	My spouse's encouraging words give me confidence. I like to watch movies with my spouse.	A B
28)	Gifts from my spouse are always special to me. I love it when my spouse can't keep his hands off me.	C E
29)	I feel loved when my spouse enthusiastically helps me despite being busy. I feel loved when my spouse tells me how much I am appreciated.	D A
30)	I love hugging and kissing my spouse after we've been apart for a while. I love hearing my spouse tell me that he missed me.	E A

Now that you're finished, count the number of times you wrote down each letter. One of them should seem more dominant than the others; that one will be your love language.

Mostly A's: **Words of affirmation**

Mostly B's: **Quality time**

Mostly C's: **Receiving gifts**

Mostly D's: **Acts of service**

Mostly E's: **Physical touch**

- 3) Discuss together who does what in your marriage / home. For instance, you could work through a practical list given below. Please add / edit it. Of course, you do this with the understanding that you are a team; so if one person is not able to do something that they normally do, the other steps

in to help. Please assign by putting a tick (✓). Some tasks may be shared and some of these may be outsourced.

Task	Husband	Wife	Outside help
Prayer and devotions as family			
Earning for family			
Managing finances			
Paying bills			
Cooking			
Keeping home clean			
Laundry			
Ironing clothes			
Grocery shopping			
Vehicle maintenance			
Nurturing kids in the faith			
Overseeing kids' studies and activities			

TURNING POINT

Pray over the following for your own life.

- 1) *Lord, please empower me to be the kind of husband / wife you have called me to be.* (Now pray specifically for the 6 or 4 areas that we discussed for the husband / wife asking God to empower you to do these).
- 2) Review what you have written as things you can do to practically demonstrate the 15 aspects of the God-kind of love described in 1 Corinthians 13 on page 44. Pray over these that God will empower you to walk in this kind of love toward your spouse.

ACTION ITEM

Follow through on the “who-does-what-list” for your marriage / home. Do this consistently and cheerfully to bless your marriage and family.



5

ATTITUDES, TEMPERAMENT, AND BEHAVIOR

When husband and wife interact, make decisions, and live together over an extended period, their attitudes and temperament play a vital role in determining how their relationship develops. As we relate to each other, what we are predominantly encountering is the other person's attitudes, temperament, and behavior being expressed in various situations. A person may have great skills as well as intellectual and other capabilities but all these come packaged in that person's attitudes, temperament, and behavior. Similarly, a person may have great looks, appearance, charm, and charisma but all these come along with that individual's attitudes and temperament. We cannot separate them.

By attitudes and temperament, we refer to the way a person thinks, perceives, behaves, and reacts. Essentially, we are dealing with the mental and emotional traits of a person expressed through their communication and action.

When two individuals with different attitudes and temperament face the same situation, the way each one would THINK, PERCEIVE, ACT, and COMMUNICATE would greatly differ.

So, in the context of marriage and family, this brings up two challenges.

- 1) **Personal:** The need to ensure that the way I think, perceive, act, and communicate is healthy and contributes positively to my marriage and family.
- 2) **Interpersonal:** The need to understand how my spouse thinks, perceives, acts, and communicates in varied situations so that I understand my spouse correctly.

Ultimately, we must face up to the fact that negative attitudes and behaviors can be detrimental to the marriage relationship. Negative emotions, attitudes, and behaviors need to be addressed and as individuals, we need to develop Christlike attitudes, a Spirit-controlled temperament, and a Word-governed behavior.

In Chapter 2, as part of “**Preparing for Marriage**,” we stressed the need to be in good emotional health. We also listed several negative emotional attitudes and behaviors that need to be addressed if any were present. In this chapter, we look at the biblical antidote to negative attitudes and behaviors.

Christlike attitude

As believers, we are called to grow up into Christlikeness (Ephesians 4:13) and walk as Christ walked (1 John 2:6). This applies to our marriage as well, in how we relate to our spouse and children. We must be Christlike. We are called to have the same attitude as Christ.

Philippians 2:3-8 (GNT)

³ Don't do anything from selfish ambition or from a cheap desire to boast, but be humble toward one another, always considering others better than yourselves.

⁴ And look out for one another's interests, not just for your own.

⁵ The attitude you should have is the one that Christ Jesus had:

- ⁶ He always had the nature of God,
 but he did not think that by force he should try to remain equal with God.
- ⁷ Instead of this, of his own free will he gave up all he had,
 and took the nature of a servant.
 He became like a human being
 and appeared in human likeness.
- ⁸ He was humble and walked the path of obedience all the way to death—
 his death on the cross.

In the Philippians 2:3-8 context, we are called to have attitudes of selflessness, humility, sacrifice, giving preference to others, looking out for the other's interests, not self-centered, servant-like attitude not holding on to what was or is our own or our own rights.

Similarly, in several other places in Scripture, we are encouraged to maintain positive, godly, Christlike attitudes as believers.

Here are some examples.

Ephesians 5:20 (GNT)

In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, always give thanks for everything to God the Father.

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 (GNT)

¹⁶ Be joyful always,

¹⁷ pray at all times,

¹⁸ be thankful in all circumstances. This is what God wants from you in your life in union with Christ Jesus.

Philippians 2:14,15 (GNT)

¹⁴ Do everything without complaining or arguing,

¹⁵ so that you may be innocent and pure as God's perfect children...

Philippians 4:4-8 (GNT)

⁴ May you always be joyful in your union with the Lord. I say it again: rejoice!

⁵ Show a gentle attitude toward everyone. The Lord is coming soon.

⁶ Don't worry about anything, but in all your prayers ask God for what you need, always asking him with a thankful heart.

⁷ And God's peace, which is far beyond human understanding, will keep your hearts and minds safe in union with Christ Jesus.

⁸ In conclusion, my friends, fill your minds with those things that are good and that deserve praise: things that are true, noble, right, pure, lovely, and honorable.

James 1:2-4

² My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials,

³ knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience.

⁴ But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.

James 5:9 (GNT)

Do not complain against one another, my friends, so that God will not judge you. The Judge is near, ready to appear.

James 5:13 (The Message)

Are you hurting? Pray. Do you feel great? Sing.

1 Peter 2:21-23 (GNT)

²¹ It was to this that God called you, for Christ himself suffered for you and left you an example, so that you would follow in his steps.

²² He committed no sin, and no one ever heard a lie come from his lips.

²³ When he was insulted, he did not answer back with an insult; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but placed his hopes in God, the righteous Judge.

What do these passages teach us about the attitudes and behavior we must maintain as believers? Remember that these are attitudes that we must live by even in our marriage and at home.

<i>being full of faith</i>	<i>being gentle</i>	<i>being innocent (not thinking evil)</i>	<i>being joyful</i>	<i>being joyful even in trials</i>
<i>being patient</i>	<i>being prayerful</i>	<i>being thankful</i>	<i>enjoying God's peace</i>	<i>giving preference to others</i>
<i>humility</i>	<i>looking out for the other's interests</i>	<i>not arguing</i>	<i>not complaining about others</i>	<i>not insisting on our own rights</i>
<i>not insulting back</i>	<i>not lying</i>	<i>not self-centered</i>	<i>not threatening and not retaliating</i>	<i>not worrying</i>
<i>not complaining</i>	<i>praying</i>	<i>rejoicing</i>	<i>singing</i>	<i>sacrifice</i>
<i>selflessness</i>	<i>servant-like attitude</i>	<i>thinking on things that are true</i>	<i>thinking on things that deserve praise</i>	<i>thinking on things that are good</i>

The opposite of these positive Christlike attitudes is what we will call negative attitudes. Here is a list of negative attitudes and related behaviors.

<i>anger</i>	<i>arrogance</i>	<i>argumentative</i>	<i>blaming others</i>	<i>bitterness</i>
<i>controlling</i>	<i>condescending</i>	<i>cowardice</i>	<i>complaining</i>	<i>critical</i>
<i>cunning</i>	<i>cynical</i>	<i>demanding</i>	<i>depressive</i>	<i>dishonest</i>
<i>dissatisfaction</i>	<i>discontentment</i>	<i>deceptive</i>	<i>envy</i>	<i>greed</i>
<i>guarded</i>	<i>guilt</i>	<i>hatred</i>	<i>inadequacy</i>	<i>indifference</i>
<i>intolerance</i>	<i>insecurity</i>	<i>irresponsibility</i>	<i>jealousy</i>	<i>judgmental</i>
<i>low self-esteem</i>	<i>lust</i>	<i>manipulative</i>	<i>negativity</i>	<i>overly assertive</i>
<i>overly aggressive</i>	<i>pessimism</i>	<i>prejudice</i>	<i>pride</i>	<i>resentment</i>
<i>revengeful</i>	<i>rude</i>	<i>sarcasm</i>	<i>secretive</i>	<i>self-centeredness</i>
<i>selfishness</i>	<i>shame</i>	<i>skeptical</i>	<i>stingy</i>	<i>suspicious</i>
<i>thoughtlessness</i>	<i>unforgiving</i>	<i>untrusting</i>	<i>unsympathetic</i>	<i>victimized</i>

When you have a bad attitude, you tend to see people and situations in the worst possible way. Negativity and pessimism taints everything you SEE, SAY, and DO. This leads to you being unhappy, always complaining, criticizing, finding fault, and exhibiting other negative behaviors. This results in not only you being unhappy, but others around you are also being affected and becoming unhappy.

Your attitude influences your EXPECTATION, your EXPERIENCE, and your EXIT.

When you are about to start something, your attitude sets your expectation—whether you expect something good and exciting OR whether you expect something bad, boring, or tragic to happen.

As you journey through, your attitude influences your experience—whether you enjoy it, whether you can make the most of situations, challenges, setbacks, and surprises, whether you are able to make changes, adapt, and progress OR whether you let things get you down and just pull through and drag along, just waiting for things to be over.

Finally, your attitude determines how you exit—whether you leave taking the good and positives out of the journey OR whether you leave holding on to the negatives, grumbling, and complaining.

Negative attitudes and behaviors don't help us to be Christlike.

Negative attitudes and behaviors are either learned or come because of negative emotions at their roots. For example, a person who has unresolved bottled-up anger inside him (carrying anger for whatever reason) tends to release this through negative attitudes and behaviors. This could include hurtful words, sarcasm, teasing, cynical remarks, or even physical violence.

Your attitude is a choice. Difficult situations, challenges, and other unpleasant things in life will always come. The attitude you maintain, how you think, perceive, act, and react is your choice.

The good news is that if we are open to the Lord, He will do His work in us to change our negative attitudes and behaviors. He will deal with issues at their root and bring about a permanent change. He brings about change in our lives that is lasting. He works in us making us willing and able to do what is right (Philippians 2:13). His Holy Spirit works in us and transforms us into His likeness in an ever-increasing measure (2 Corinthians 3:18). We must pray and ask Him to deal with our negative attitudes and behaviors and change them so that we can have Christlike attitudes and behaviors.

Spirit-controlled temperament

An individual's temperament expresses itself in their personality, the way they think, perceive, behave, and react. Broadly speaking, we refer to a person as an introvert or an extrovert when referring to their personality. There are various “personality-type” systems that attempt to categorize personality. Of these, a theory, originally suggested by the Greek physician Hippocrates, is the four personality types—sanguine, choleric, melancholic, and phlegmatic. Although this theory is not scientific and rejected by the medical community, it helps us have a useful framework with which to understand personality. Each personality type has its characteristic traits, its strengths, and weaknesses. An individual usually has a blend of these, with primary and secondary personality types. [For more information see www.fourtemperaments.com] There are other personality-type theories that have been proposed as well.

Regardless of what blend of personality types we may recognize in ourselves, ultimately, we must understand that our temperament and personality, with its traits, strengths, and weaknesses is a choice, and can be developed. We are not prisoners of what we are born with, the environment we grew up in, or behaviors we learned during our growing up years. If we choose to, we can unlearn what is wrong and develop what is good and positive.

As believers, the Bible calls us to be filled with the Spirit. This means that we as individuals, including our personalities and temperaments are to be so influenced by the Holy Spirit that we begin to express His nature and character. We are still ourselves as individuals, but we choose to yield to the Spirit of God (and hence, we are “Spirit-controlled” or “filled with the Spirit”) so that His nature, character, power, and strength can be expressed through our lives to glorify God and to bless other people. When we do this consistently as a way of life, we are “*walking in the Spirit.*” Our life is then characterized by what the Bible calls as the “*fruit of the Spirit.*”

Galatians 5:22,23 (GNT)

²² But the Spirit produces love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,

²³ humility, and self-control. There is no law against such things as these.

When we are Spirit-filled (or “Spirit-controlled”), the Spirit produces these wonderful traits or qualities in our lives. Our temperament and personality become characterized by these—

LOVE (affection for others)	JOY (exuberance about life)	PEACE (serenity)
PATIENCE (a willingness to stick with things)	KINDNESS (a sense of compassion in the heart)	GOODNESS (desiring to bless others)
FAITHFULNESS (loyal commitments)	HUMILITY (not needing to force our way in life)	SELF-CONTROL (able to marshal and direct our energies wisely)

(Note: Parentheses have text from *The Message Bible.*)

Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom (2 Corinthians 3:17). The Holy Spirit brings righteousness, peace, and joy (Romans 14:17). These fill our lives releasing us from wrong attitudes and behaviors, and empowering us in what is good.

Word-governed behavior

John 14:15 (GNT)

“If you love me, you will obey my commandments.

2 Timothy 3:16,17 (GNT)

¹⁶ All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching the truth, rebuking error, correcting faults, and giving instruction for right living,

¹⁷ so that the person who serves God may be fully qualified and equipped to do every kind of good deed.

Our love for God is demonstrated through the way we align ourselves in obedience to His Word. Our behavior, what we say and do has to be governed by His Word. It is the Word of God that is truth, rebukes error, corrects faults, and gives us instruction on how to live right. So, we need to embrace and submit to the Word of God. This applies to our relationship with our spouse as well.

Consider the following Scriptures that instruct us on how to behave or conduct ourselves, which includes how we behave within marriage and family.

Colossians 3:12-15 (GNT)

¹² You are the people of God; he loved you and chose you for his own. So then, you must clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience.

¹³ Be tolerant with one another and forgive one another whenever any of you has a complaint against someone else. You must forgive one another just as the Lord has forgiven you.

¹⁴ And to all these qualities add love, which binds all things together in perfect unity.

¹⁵ The peace that Christ gives is to guide you in the decisions you make; for it is to this peace that God has called you together in the one body. And be thankful.

1 Peter 3:7-11 (GNT)

⁷ In the same way you husbands must live with your wives with the proper understanding that they are more delicate than you. Treat them with respect, because they also will receive, together with you, God's gift of life. Do this so that nothing will interfere with your prayers.

⁸ To conclude: you must all have the same attitude and the same feelings; love one another, and be kind and humble with one another.

⁹ Do not pay back evil with evil or cursing with cursing; instead, pay back with a blessing, because a blessing is what God promised to give you when he called you.

¹⁰ As the scripture says,

“If you want to enjoy life
and wish to see good times,
you must keep from speaking evil
and stop telling lies.

¹¹ You must turn away from evil and do good;
you must strive for peace with all your heart.

The Word teaches us to walk in compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, to be tolerant, to forgive, to walk in peace, to treat with respect, etc. Our actions must be out of love and not out of anger, hate or retaliation. Our behavior must be governed by such instructions in God's Word. This is the standard set for our behavior.

Personal transformation

Having understood that there are godly attitudes, temperament, and behaviors that we need to align ourselves to, how does each of us make the transition from our current attitudes, temperament, and behaviors to what God desires for us?

How can each of us come to the place where we have our attitudes, temperament, and behaviors transformed to what God calls us to—Christlike attitudes, Spirit-controlled temperament, and a Word-governed behavior?

All of us begin at the same place. We are sinful. Our attitudes and behaviors are marred or flawed in many ways. We could be emotionally hurt, carrying negative emotions inside, and our thinking could be warped and distorted through life's experiences. We could be bound to wrong behavior patterns, addictive behaviors, sinful lifestyles, and so on. We need to recognize and acknowledge what is wrong when compared to the light and standards that God has established and set for us in the Scripture.

We believe that there are four very important truths which every one of us need to be established in to see transformation take place in us. The first two are completed. God has already done this for us, and He then calls us to walk (live) out of the work He has already completed. The next two are ongoing; something we walk in daily.

1) The power of the cross

The work that Jesus did on the cross not only brings forgiveness from sin but also freedom from the dominion of sin itself and healing for the total person—spirit, soul, and body. The power and dominion of sin over our lives has been broken so that we need no longer be slaves of sin.

Isaiah 53:4,5 (GNT)

⁴“But he endured the suffering that should have been ours,
the pain that we should have borne.
All the while we thought that his suffering
was punishment sent by God.
⁵But because of our sins he was wounded,
beaten because of the evil we did.
We are healed by the punishment he suffered,
made whole by the blows he received.

Romans 6:6,14 (GNT)

⁶And we know that our old being has been put to death with Christ on his cross, in order that the power of the sinful self might be destroyed, so that we should no longer be the slaves of sin.

¹⁴Sin must not be your master; for you do not live under law but under God’s grace.

The Lord Jesus has provided for our complete wholeness through His death on the cross. This includes healing from emotional wounds, pains, and hurts. We need to see ourselves healed and whole through the cross of Jesus Christ. The Lord Jesus broke the power of sin. This means that no sinful habit or lifestyle pattern can control us. We need to see ourselves completely set free through the power of the cross. Everything Jesus died to provide for us is ours. We must claim what He has provided for us and walk in it.

The cross also becomes the basis on which we extend forgiveness to those who have wronged us. Because He has forgiven us and we are recipients of His grace, we now extend forgiveness and grace to others.

2) My identity in Christ

Once we are born again, we are brought into a spiritual union with Christ. We are “in Christ.” We are “in Him” in spirit. We become a new creation in Christ. As new creations in Christ, everything about us has changed. As the Scripture states “*the old is gone, the new has come*” (2 Corinthians 5:17,

GN). Our spiritual identity, our nature, our standing (position) before God, before the world, before the powers of darkness have all been changed. In Christ, we are empowered and blessed. Who we are in Christ is who we really are!

We must now live out of the new life, identity, and resources in Christ. When we do so, our perspective of ourselves (self-image, self-esteem, confidence) changes. Our perspective of other people around us changes. Our perspective and attitude toward life's challenges and situations changes. Our perspective toward satan and demonic forces, and their demonic works changes. We view all of these through who we are in Christ.

If we truly understood and lived out of these two powerful truths—the completed work of Christ on the cross and our identity in Christ, we will live strong, positive, and confident lives. We will truly be transformed in our daily living.

3) The renewing of my mind

The renewing of our minds (changing our way of perceiving and thinking) takes place as we replace our own thoughts and ideas with the thoughts and truths of God as given to us in His Word. As our minds are being renewed, our lifestyle undergoes a transformation.

Romans 12:2

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

For our minds to be renewed, we consistently and intentionally meditate on God's Word and align our thinking with the truth of God's Word. We choose to think aligned to God's Word. We perceive circumstances and situations in life from the perspective of God's Word. This is an ongoing process.

A renewed mind results in a transformed lifestyle.

4) Walking in the Spirit

In addition to renewing our minds constantly with God's Word, we are also called to “*walk in the Spirit*.” This means that we live our lives yielded to the Holy Spirit. We learn to follow the leading and guidance of the Holy Spirit. We learn to know what pleases Him and what grieves Him (Ephesians 4:30). We learn to give Him influence over our words and deeds, and not quench His working in us or through us (1 Thessalonians 5:19).

Ephesians 5:18-21 (GNT)

¹⁸Do not get drunk with wine, which will only ruin you; instead, be filled with the Spirit.

¹⁹Speak to one another with the words of psalms, hymns, and sacred songs; sing hymns and psalms to the Lord with praise in your hearts.

²⁰In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, always give thanks for everything to God the Father.

²¹Submit yourselves to one another because of your reverence for Christ.

When we walk in the Spirit, we build each other up spiritually, we are continually in an attitude of praise and worship toward our God. We are thankful, and we walk in humility.

When we walk in the Spirit, we also do away with the “*works of the flesh*,” things that we would do out of the impulse of the evil desires of our body. Fighting, quarreling, anger, jealousy, hatred, and other similar things are classified as works of the flesh (Galatians 5:19-21). However, the Holy Spirit enables us to crucify (put an end) the sinful deeds of the flesh (Romans 8:12,13). When we walk in the Spirit, we put an end to these works of the flesh and instead we can have the “*fruit of the Spirit*” expressed through our lives (Galatians 5:22,23).

Galatians 5:16,24,25

¹⁶ I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.

²⁴ And those who are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

²⁵ If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.

So, to sum up, the ability to think, perceive, act, and communicate with Christlike attitudes, a Spirit-controlled temperament and having a Word-governed behavior is

- 1) to live out of the power of the cross,
- 2) to live out of our identity in Christ,
- 3) to live out of a renewed mind, and
- 4) to walk in the Spirit.

Every believer can do this!

Relating to and understanding my spouse

I need to maintain Christlike attitudes, a Spirit-controlled temperament, and a Word-governed behavior when I relate to and understand my spouse. The model and the standard set for the husband-wife relationship is “just as” it is between Christ and His Church.

Ephesians 5:24,25 (GNT)

²⁴ And so wives must submit themselves completely to their husbands just as the church submits itself to Christ.

²⁵ Husbands, love your wives just as Christ loved the church and gave his life for it.

Relating to my spouse

In what ways must I change to become more Christlike, Spirit-controlled, and Word-governed in my attitudes, temperament, and behavior toward my spouse?

	Areas I must change
Thoughts (<i>What I think about my spouse</i>)	
Perception (<i>How I view my spouse</i>)	

Action <i>(What I do—to and for my spouse)</i>	
Communication <i>(What I say—to and about my spouse)</i>	

Understanding my spouse

In what ways can I better understand how my spouse thinks, perceives, acts, and communicates in various situations so that I understand my spouse correctly?

	Areas I must change
Thoughts (How do I better understand what he / she is really thinking and feeling?)	
Perception (How do I better understand his / her point of view?)	
Action (How can I better understand his / her actions?)	
Communication (How can I better understand what he / she is really saying?)	

Now, I need to draw upon the power of the cross, the power of who I am in Christ, work on renewing my mind, and walk in the Spirit to see change and transformation in the way I relate (in my attitudes, temperament, and behavior) to my spouse and the way I understand my spouse. I must maintain Christlike attitude, Spirit-controlled temperament, and Word-governed behavior as I relate to my spouse.

APPLICATION

In the light of what we have covered in this chapter, reflect on the following:

Attitude check

Given below are descriptions of a positive attitude or reaction in each situation. For each description, indicate how often you tend to take this attitude or reaction. Place a check (✓) mark in the most appropriate option.

How often do you feel this way?	Very rarely	Quite frequently	Almost always
In personal life			
I try to find the good in people and see the good in them. I try to see them as God would see them.			
When I feel sorry for myself, I encourage myself in God and His Word.			
I remain flexible and open to change in plans. I live with the understanding that all things work for my good as I live for His purpose.			
If I am upset or angered, I pray, release, let go, and get over it quickly.			
When people criticize, offend, or insult me, I seek the Holy Spirit's help and rise above it very quickly.			
I do not retaliate or put others down, but forgive, forget, and choose to walk in the love of God.			
When faced with mountains, I see them through the promises of God. I believe every mountain can be moved.			
I look at the positives in situations. I see the glass as half-full instead of half-empty. I know that God can turn the worst situation around for my good.			
When faced with challenges, I look for solutions rather than focus on the problem. God is bigger than the situation and gives me wisdom to be a problem-solver.			

How often do you feel this way?	Very rarely	Quite frequently	Almost always
I see mistakes as opportunities to learn from and improve. I ask God to help me learn and gain wisdom from my mistakes.			
When I sin, I receive God's forgiveness, repent, change my ways, and live free from guilt and shame.			
I hold myself accountable to ensure my behavior aligns itself to God's Word.			
I speak gently and politely to others. I understand meekness and gentleness is true strength.			
I speak positive words, hope, encouragement, and faith to those around me.			
I am patient and encouraging with people's shortcomings. I correct in love.			
I enjoy life. It's exciting to be alive. I am loving it.			
I am filled with a sense of divine purpose. I see God's hand at work in me and for me.			
I enjoy sacrificing for Kingdom purposes and give cheerfully to be a blessing to others.			
When relating to my spouse			
When my spouse does something wrong, I correct lovingly, positively, and encouragingly.			
When my spouse requests me to do something the way he / she prefers it be done instead of the way I normally do it, I oblige and do it the way my spouse likes it done.			
I consciously refuse to recall and repeat past mistakes, hurts, and wrongdoing by my spouse.			
When my spouse does well and succeeds in something, I recognize, acknowledge, and celebrate it.			
When we discuss matters, I am open to letting go of my personal ideas for something that is better.			

How often do you feel this way?	Very rarely	Quite frequently	Almost always
I stay positive for my spouse in difficult situations and conscious not to wear each other down with negativity. I apply the Philippians 4:6,7 principle.			
I take things in my stride if we must change our plans and take alternate options due to unexpected situations.			
If finances are temporarily tight, I am still joyful and look to God as my Provider.			
I sacrifice cheerfully to provide room for my spouse to pursue something that is important for my spouse.			
When relating to my children			
When my child does poorly in his / her studies, I remain positive and speak encouragingly. I look for ways to make my child improve.			
When I think of my children, I think of them with faith and hope believing God's promises to be fulfilled in their lives.			
When my child points out that my table is a mess when I am insisting that he / she cleans his / her table, I graciously accept my failure and agree that both of us should be tidy.			
When my child genuinely enquires as to why a certain instruction has to be followed, I grasp this opportunity as a teachable moment and explain things lovingly instead of considering my child's questioning as rebellion.			
After disciplining my child for wrong behavior, I then affirm my love by hugging my child, letting my child know that I still love him / her, and have let go of the incident as past and dealt with.			
When my child fails to clean his / her room for the umpteenth time, I still refrain from calling him / her "lazy pig" / other names and instead patiently explain and encourage him / her to keep her room clean and tidy.			

How often do you feel this way?	Very rarely	Quite frequently	Almost always
When my child starts narrating what happened during his / her day at school and goes into a long-winded description of details, I patiently give him / her an attentive listening ear with interest in what is going on in his / her life.			

Our goal must be to transition from “very rarely” to “quite frequently” and to make these attitudes and behaviors as “almost always” the normal way of life. Use what we have learned in this chapter to receive personal transformation and make this transition in your attitudes and behaviors.

Attitude and behavioral transformation

“*Two are better off than one ... If one of them falls down, the other can help him up ...*” (Ecclesiastes 4:9,10, GNT) is what the Scriptures teach us. As husband and wife, you can hold each other accountable to maintain Christlike attitudes, Spirit-controlled temperament, and Word-governed behavior. When you observe a negative attitude or behavior, provide a response that holds your spouse accountable to Christlikeness. Do this lovingly and gently, never in a judgmental, critical, or condescending manner. Do it with the understanding that you are working together to build each other up in Christlikeness and to have a great marriage together. Do not do this without first agreeing together that you are going to hold each other accountable. Otherwise, you may appear to be “policing” your spouse and a well-intended practice may cause damage.

Here are just a few example scenarios and sample responses. These are just examples and you do not have to use these verbatim. You can think of many more and decide on how you could respond. (Please use your own term of endearment for your spouse).

When you observe this attitude or behavior in your spouse	Here is how you could respond
When your spouse is complaining or grumbling about the way things are, certain situations at home, work, church, or other setting.	“... <i>what if we see the good that is happening and we choose to accept and enjoy the good instead of focusing on the not-so-good.</i> ”
When your spouse feels offended and seems to carry unforgiveness, resentment, and is inclined to retaliate toward those who have brought pain.	“... <i>I understand that what was done was unfair and has hurt you. But with God's help, we can forgive and still love them.</i> ”
When your spouse is critical of people and is pointing out faults in others without helping bring about a positive change.	“... <i>maybe we should look for the good and see the good in that person. Or maybe we should see how we can help that person overcome those weaknesses.</i> ”
When your spouse seems ungrateful, unhappy, and dissatisfied with what you have.	“... <i>I'm sure we can be thankful for all that we do have. There is so much to be grateful for.</i> ”
When your spouse seems to be proud, boastful, and bragging about some personal achievement, skill, etc.	“... <i>we know all we have is God's mercy on our lives. Let's keep it that way and stay humble.</i> ”

When your spouse seems selfish and self-centered in a situation, unwilling to give, share, make a sacrifice.	“...you know God has blessed us so much. I'm sure we can be selfless , think about their need, sacrifice a little and be generous by giving something to them.”
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TURNING POINT

Pray over the following for your own life.

Lord, empower me to have a Christlike attitude, a Spirit-controlled temperament, and a Word-governed behavior.

- *I embrace the power of the cross and receive healing and wholeness to my total person. Through the power of the cross, I receive my freedom from sinful patterns, addictions, and bondages that control me. Because I am forgiven, I now release forgiveness to anyone who may have offended me.* (Take time to pray over anything specific you need to address.)
- *I embrace who I am in Christ as the basis for my identity, my self-image, my security, and my true potential in God. Who I am in Christ is who I really am!*
- *Lord, empower me to renew my mind with Your Word and think the way You would think in every situation.*
- *Lord, enable me to walk in the Spirit manifesting the Spirit's character and nature, and doing away with the sinful deeds of my own flesh. Let the fruit of the Spirit be seen in me.*
- *Lord, empower me and give me Your grace to maintain Christlike attitudes. Empower me so that I will not grumble or complain about anything! Instead I will always be thankful and joyful in all things in my God. Lord, empower me and give me Your grace so that I will not be anxious or disturbed when I face unexpected or difficult situations. Lord, empower me and give me Your grace so that I will not be offended if I am corrected, criticized, or even insulted. Instead, help me to receive it graciously. Lord, empower me and give me Your grace to always speak positive, faith-filled, uplifting, and encouraging words. Help me to always acknowledge with faith Your promises as true regardless of the situation or how I feel.*
- *Every time I think of my spouse, help me to be thankful and celebrate the good things he / she has. “Lord, thank You for giving me my husband / wife as Your awesome gift. Help me to see the good things You have placed in him / her. He / she is Your gift to me!”*

You never appreciate all
the work I do, you don't even
step into the kitchen, you
hardly compliment me,
you're so lucky you have me!
anyone else would've
walked out on you...
You never...

Remember.. My marriage is not a bad
thing.. It is NOT burdensome..

6

COMMUNICATION IN MARRIAGE

Communication styles, the frame of reference, and contexts in which things are spoken and understood can vary between two different individuals, especially if they come from different cultural or social backgrounds. In marriage, communication is important and essential to maintain and build a strong relationship. Communication skills required for marriage can be quite different from general, social, or professional communication. Typically, in marriage, there is the need to go to deeper levels of communication than is typically used in general, social or professional communication. Hence, we need to intentionally develop our communication skills specific to our personal marriage relationship.

Different levels of communication

Our goal in communication is to understand and be understood, which is essential for all kinds of human relationship. We recognize that there are different “levels” at which we communicate depending on how much of personal information is being shared.

Casual: We could have the casual, bare minimum level of communication where we do the casual greeting and a few pleasantries like, “Hi, how are you? Nice to see you. Hope you are having a good day, have a nice day, etc.” Although we are communicating, we are not sharing very much. We are being polite and courteous, but not much beyond that.

Professional: We could have communication that involves sharing of information, facts, ideas, thoughts, analysis, etc. This typically happens when making decisions, explaining your point of view, and is what we normally do in professional settings.

Friendship: Here we go a level deeper sharing our feelings, emotions, and thoughts a lot more freely as would happen between two good friends. There is a sense of liberty to share one’s dreams and know that there would be support and encouragement. Even correction is freely given and received knowing that the other’s intentions are good.

Intimate: Communication at an intimate level is what we seek to establish in a marriage relationship. With an increasing level of trust, commitment, and friendship, we are now able to share almost anything and everything of who we are, what we feel, think, hope, and dream.

While many of the things we state here are in relation to the husband-wife married relationship, we can apply these same principles and truths to communication with our children.

Time, trust, transparency

For healthy, meaningful communication to occur, we need (a) **time** (b) **trust** (c) **transparency**. In the

context of marriage, husband and wife would need to invest time, build trust, and develop transparency to engage in healthy and meaningful communication. This is extremely important for nurturing and growing in a marriage.

(i) Time

- Setting aside regular time each day to catch up with what is happening in each other's lives. This could be over a meal or spending relaxed time together when suited to both your schedules.
- Needs to be at a time of day when both have the energy levels to engage in meaningful conversation.
- Do this intentionally. Life can get busy and if our schedule is not structured to accommodate this, it is likely that time together will not happen.
- Quickly take care of professional talk that addresses “to do lists” and “things to be done,” etc., and try to engage in conversation at friendship and intimate levels.
- Plan for extended periods of together-time over weekends as well as during vacations for conversation.
- Make communication happen. Since meaningful and healthy communication requires time, as married couples, we need to make time for this. We need to give our marriage its rightful priority in our lives and invest time into building our marriage.

(ii) Trust

- Trust is something that is both earned and given. Learn to trust your spouse, which is giving him or her your confidence, that sense of assurance that you believe in them, and what they are sharing. Trust is also earned. So, make sure your actions back up your words. Make sure you do not lie. If your spouse sees you as a liar, then your spouse will have to weigh everything you say and try to determine if you are stating the truth or lying. It will be difficult to build a marriage where there is no trust.
- Your spouse also needs to be able to trust you that the personal things he / she shares with you will not be discussed with others, not even other family members. There must be trust that the confidential matters will be kept in confidence.
- There must be trust that the personal things you share will not be used against you in times of conflict. The way you can give this assurance to your spouse is by making sure that you do not use what your spouse has shared with you against him / her in times of disagreements or conflict.

(iii) Transparency

- Transparency takes time to build.
- Transparency is being able to share your innermost thoughts including your dreams, your aspirations, withholding nothing.

Quick check

On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 = never, 2 = sometimes, 3 = often, 4 = most often, 5 = always true), rate what you feel about communication between you and your spouse at present.

The way things are	
I feel we have adequate time for meaningful conversations during the week.	
I feel we have adequate time for meaningful conversations during the weekend.	
I feel free to express myself.	
I feel my spouse pays attention when I am speaking.	
I feel I am being understood.	
I am not afraid that my speaking will lead into an argument.	
I feel we understand each other's perspectives and frame of reference when we communicate.	
I can talk at the level of friendship and intimacy.	
I feel safe and secure in sharing secrets, weaknesses, and challenges.	
I feel my spouse trusts what I say.	

Communication—an important building block for a strong marriage

Good communication is key to building a good marriage. When a husband and wife can have meaningful and healthy communication between them, it helps their marriage in several ways.

- 1) Know and understand each other:** Which makes them draw closer to each other.
- 2) Work as a team:** Because they can communicate and understand each other, they are now able to do things together and work as a team.
- 3) Support each other:** They can be there to encourage, support, nurture, and strengthen each other.
- 4) Resolve issues:** There will be differences in tastes, perspectives, and opinions. But because they have a healthy communication system between them, they can discuss each other's ideas, evaluate things, and make good decisions. When conflicts arise, they can work through these differences and resolve things peacefully.
- 5) Grow spiritually together:** They can share spiritual revelation and learning with each other to grow together in the faith. They can speak into each other's lives when either one needs spiritual support and encouragement.
- 6) Guard your marriage:** Spouses who have a meaningful and healthy communication are close to each other and hence, can keep their focus on each other. They do not wander off seeking emotional or physical companionship elsewhere.
- 7) Nurture children:** How the parents communicate with each other will also have an impact on children, what is taught to the children, their sense of security, feeling loved, and nurtured.
- 8) Cherish memories:** You can look back, reflect, and talk about the good things you have enjoyed together. You can relive those moments as you reflect together, be inspired, and encouraged as you look back on the journey you have made together this far.

Attentive listening

James 1:19 (GNT)

Remember this, my dear friends! Everyone must be quick to listen, but slow to speak and slow to become angry.

Proverbs 18:13 (GNT)

Listen before you answer. If you don't, you are being stupid and insulting.

Listening is more than hearing someone. In listening, you are trying to understand the person through what they are saying, what they are feeling, and what they are expressing through their body language. The goal in attentive listening is to understand the person.

Here are some general, commonly understood skills for good listening.

Be attentive: Give your spouse undivided time and attention. This would mean facing them, maintaining eye contact, putting aside distractions, or other things you might be doing. Don't try to watch TV, read the newspaper, work on your laptop, and also engage in a meaningful conversation with your spouse.

Be open: Don't jump to conclusions about your spouse or what he / she is saying or on the outcome of the conversation. Stay with them through all that is being said.

Be patient: Listen patiently without interrupting. Wait till they have finished saying what they wish to say.

Be clear about what was said: Make sure you have heard clearly and understood correctly. If you are not sure, ask questions to ensure that you have understood correctly. Summarize. Repeat what you have understood. Try to understand the ideas and the emotions, not just words and sequence.

Be responsive: Let them know you are listening by nodding your head or make non-interrupting short words or statements.

Be sensitive: To feelings and to body language.

Listening skills questionnaire

The questionnaire poses several questions about various aspects of listening actively. Apply the questions to yourself and respond by noting "Yes" or "No".

	Question	Yes / No
1)	When you are listening to someone, do you try to separate the verbal and non-verbal messages?	
2)	Do you look for what the other person is not saying, or for any hidden agendas?	
3)	Do you ask questions to clarify anything that you do not fully understand or to check if you have received the message correctly?	
4)	Do you reflect your understanding back to the person with both verbal and non-verbal actions?	
5)	When you agree with the other person, do you make that support known?	
6)	Do you give the other person your full attention when they are speaking even if you are not particularly interested?	

7)	Do you try to keep an open mind and try to push to the back of your mind any opinions you might already have on the subject?	
8)	Do you take notes to assist recall?	
9)	Do you “imitate” the other person’s body language?	
10)	Do you wait till the other person has finished before reflecting on the subject matter or formulating any questions or opinions?	
11)	Do you look at the other person and try to make eye contact?	
12)	Do you encourage the other person, for example, by saying, “Go on...” or “Tell me more”?	
13)	Do you try to develop empathy for the other person?	
14)	Do you maintain silence if the other person does not immediately answer a question?	
15)	Do you reflect the thoughts and feelings back to the other person?	
16)	Do you avoid saying things such as, “I know how you feel” even when in situations when you have experienced something similar?	
17)	Do you focus your attention on the other person rather than yourself?	
18)	Do you try to avoid any signs of restlessness, such as crossing and uncrossing your legs, looking at your watch, gazing out the window, or yawning?	
19)	When you reflect on a long conversation, a speech, a presentation, a meeting, or something similar, can you generally remember most of what was said?	
20)	Do you find that colleagues and friends like to talk things through with you or use you as a sounding board?	

When you have completed your responses, add up the number of “Yes” and “No” answers.

Total “Yes” ____ Total “No” ____

The greater the number you have in the “Yes” column, the better listener you are likely to be. The greater the number of “No” in your list, the less likely it is that you are a fully effective listener.

Genuinely expressing

Communication is a two-way street and so in addition to listening, you would also need to express yourself correctly and genuinely through what you say.

People have different ways in which they express themselves. Some are very **cognitive** and state facts, look at things very objectively and keep emotions out most of the time, even if they feel very strongly about something. Others are **emotional** and their feelings spill over into everything they say and do. They find it very hard to just express thoughts without emotion. Some are naturally very **loud** and often appear aggressive and may even border on being boisterous when they speak. Some are mostly **soft-spoken** and gentle. It is very hard to tell if they are passionate about something. And then, there are many other variations! Allow differences in styles of expression.

There is a lot that the Scriptures teach us about speaking. We will consider just a few here and apply that to a marriage relationship. Later, we also look at the power and effect of words.

Ephesians 4:29-32 (GNT)

²⁹Do not use harmful words, but only helpful words, the kind that build up and provide what is needed, so that what you say will do good to those who hear you.

³⁰And do not make God's Holy Spirit sad; for the Spirit is God's mark of ownership on you, a guarantee that the Day will come when God will set you free.

³¹Get rid of all bitterness, passion, and anger. No more shouting or insults, no more hateful feelings of any sort.

³²Instead, be kind and tender-hearted to one another, and forgive one another, as God has forgiven you through Christ.

- Use words that build people up.
- Use words that provide what is needed. (**Example:** Support, encouragement, love, affirmation, etc.)
- Use words that do good to those who hear.
- No shouts, insults, or hate.
- Do not use language that is obscene, profane, or vulgar.

When communicating with your spouse, align your speaking to the standards given in Ephesians.

Quick check

On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 = never, 2 = sometimes, 3 = often, 4 = most often, 5 = always), rate the frequency at which you speak in this manner.

	The way I speak to my spouse	
1)	How often do you use words that convey sarcasm, are cynical, bring doubt, etc.?	
2)	How often do you say things that are helpful in what your spouse is doing (cooking, work, anything else)?	
3)	How often do you build up, empower, inspire, motivate, and cheer your spouse?	
4)	How often do you speak to meet your spouse's emotional and spiritual needs—words that support, encourage, show love, affirm, etc.?	
5)	How often do you speak in a manner that your spouse feels happy that you spoke?	
6)	How often do you shout, hurl insults, or hate through your words to your spouse?	
7)	How often does your language become obscene, profane, or vulgar when speaking?	

(If you have children, you can ask these same questions in relation to your communication with your children.)

Proverbs on communication

Discover the impact and influence of the words you speak toward each other. Review each of the Scriptures listed from the book of Proverbs. See how you can apply them to your marriage and determine action points to begin practicing what the Word says.

Proverbs	How can you apply this to your marriage?
Proverbs 11:12 (GNT) It is foolish to speak scornfully of others. If you are smart, you will keep quiet.	
Proverbs 12:18 (GNT) Thoughtless words can wound as deeply as any sword, but wisely spoken words can heal.	
Proverbs 12:25 (GNT) Worry can rob you of happiness, but kind words will cheer you up.	
Proverbs 15:1 (GNT) A gentle answer quiets anger, but a harsh one stirs it up.	
Proverbs 15:4 (GNT) Kind words bring life, but cruel words crush your spirit.	
Proverbs 15:23 (GNT) What a joy it is to find just the right word for the right occasion!	
Proverbs 16:23,24 (GNT) ²³ Intelligent people think before they speak; what they say is then more persuasive. ²⁴ Kind words are like honey—sweet to the taste and good for your health.	
Proverbs 17:27 (GNT) Those who are sure of themselves do not talk all the time. People who stay calm have real insight.	
Proverbs 21:9 (GNT) Better to live on the roof than share the house with a nagging wife.	
Proverbs 21:9 (NIV) Better to live on a corner of the roof than share a house with a quarrelsome wife.	
Proverbs 25:11 (GNT) An idea well-expressed is like a design of gold, set in silver.	
Proverbs 27:15 (GNT) A nagging wife is like water going drip-drip-drip on a rainy day.	
Proverbs 29:20 (GNT) There is more hope for a stupid fool than for someone who speaks without thinking.	
Proverbs 31:26 (GNT) She speaks with a gentle wisdom.	
Proverbs 31:28,29 (GNT) ²⁸ Her children show their appreciation, and her husband praises her. ²⁹ He says, “Many women are good wives, but you are the best of them all.”	

Preventing communication breakdown

Emotional intimacy involves expressing your feelings, thoughts, needs, hopes, aspirations, fears, and struggles with someone who is committed to you. However, when communication breaks down in a relationship, either person or both may WITHDRAW and ISOLATE themselves withholding

expression due to various reasons. With this, they tend to drift apart. They avoid communicating afraid that any interaction will only lead to conflict and outburst. They may be living in the same house but are STRANGERS to one another. Their marriage is at high risk when this begins to happen.

Here are some common reasons leading to breakdown in communication and suggestions on how to avoid them.

What causes communication breakdown	Remedy
Fear that you will be judged or criticized	Both decide that you will not judge or criticize the other even if you disagree on what is being said.
Fear that what you say will be held against you	Agree that you will not use what has been shared in retaliation against the other at any time.
Disinterest, inattentiveness, preoccupied	Agree that when the two of you are spending time in conversation, both will pause, stop doing anything else, and focus on spending time in conversation with each other.
Fear of being misunderstood	Share this concern with your spouse. Agree to make it a practice with each other to first listen till the other person has completed speaking. Clarify if needed, and then respond.
Too busy, no time to talk	Agree to set aside time convenient to both of you daily and on weekends just to be together and talk.
Suppression of emotions, choosing to hide feelings	This will take time. First, begin by spending time. Then build trust. Overtime, begin to share your feelings gradually. Agree that you will be patient and supportive of each other whenever one shares feelings, emotions, etc.

We now share a few insights on the spiritual side of communication—the spiritual impact of the words we speak. The reason we present these here is for us to understand the spiritual significance of our words even during our conversations with our spouse and children. The words we speak have impact. They connect us to the spiritual realm and affect our present and future.

The power of your words

Your words bring life or death, blessing or cursing

Proverbs 18:20,21 (GNT)

²⁰ You will have to live with the consequences of everything you say.

²¹ What you say can preserve life or destroy it; so you must accept the consequences of your words.

The Bible teaches us that our words have a significant impact on our lives. Our words shape our world. They affect our present and our future. The words we speak can bring life or death. We face the consequences of our words. So, we must speak words that are positive, words that bring life, words that are aligned to the promises of God.

Your words can build faith or destroy it

Romans 10:17 (GNT)

So then, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message comes through preaching Christ.

Faith comes by hearing the Word of God. Words can inspire faith or quench faith. When we speak words of faith, we can help nurture and strengthen faith in our spouse and children. If we speak doubt, fear, and unbelief, this is what we will infuse our family with. We must choose to speak positive and faith-filled words.

Your words release your faith or release your doubt

Matthew 17:20

So Jesus said to them, “Because of your unbelief; for assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you.

The Lord Jesus taught and demonstrated to us that faith in God is released by the words we speak. We release our faith through the words of our mouth. Hence, it is important to use our words to release our faith in God and what we are believing God to do for our spouse, children, family, and future.

Use words correctly

James 3:2-12 (GNT)

² All of us often make mistakes. But if a person never makes a mistake in what he says, he is perfect and is also able to control his whole being.

³ We put a bit into the mouth of a horse to make it obey us, and we are able to make it go where we want.

⁴ Or think of a ship: big as it is and driven by such strong winds, it can be steered by a very small rudder, and it goes wherever the pilot wants it to go.

⁵ So it is with the tongue: small as it is, it can boast about great things.

Just think how large a forest can be set on fire by a tiny flame!

⁶ And the tongue is like a fire. It is a world of wrong, occupying its place in our bodies and spreading evil through our whole being. It sets on fire the entire course of our existence with the fire that comes to it from hell itself.

⁷ We humans are able to tame and have tamed all other creatures—wild animals and birds, reptiles and fish.

⁸ But no one has ever been able to tame the tongue. It is evil and uncontrollable, full of deadly poison.

⁹ We use it to give thanks to our Lord and Father and also to curse other people, who are created in the likeness of God.

¹⁰ Words of thanksgiving and cursing pour out from the same mouth. My friends, this should not happen!

¹¹ No spring of water pours out sweet water and bitter water from the same opening.

¹² A fig tree, my friends, cannot bear olives; a grapevine cannot bear figs, nor can a salty spring produce sweet water.

The words we speak may seem small and insignificant, but they steer our lives the way a bit controls a horse, or a rudder steers a large ship. Our tongue is like a fire. It affects our entire being and our entire existence. If we have a “good tongue” that is inspired by the fire of God’s holy Word, we will bless our entire being and bless our entire existence.

A believer is saved on the inside and his tongue also needs to be “saved and sanctified.” It is not appropriate for a believer to have words of life and words of death coming from his mouth. A believer only speaks life, faith, praise, thanksgiving, hope, love, encouragement—things that are positive and reflect who God is.

Speak blessing over your spouse, your children, your marriage, your home

Numbers 6:22-27 (GNT)

²²The LORD commanded Moses

²³to tell Aaron and his sons to use the following words in blessing the people of Israel:

²⁴May the LORD bless you and take care of you;

²⁵May the LORD be kind and gracious to you;

²⁶May the LORD look on you with favor and give you peace.

²⁷And the LORD said, “If they pronounce my name as a blessing upon the people of Israel, I will bless them.”

The Lord taught His priests in the Old Testament to put His blessing upon the people by pronouncing or speaking words of blessing over them. He even gave them words of blessing to speak over the people. This is an important principle we can continue to use. Speak blessing over your spouse, children, marriage, family, your present, and your future. Declare the blessings of God and the promises of God. God will watch over His Word to fulfill it.

The spoken Word—your weapon against the enemy

Ephesians 6:17

And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God;

We are to wield the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. We use the sword against the enemy as we speak God's Word, the way that Lord Jesus did when He resisted the enemy's temptations. We must develop the discipline of speaking God's Word in faith intentionally as a way of resisting the enemy.

We have taken the liberty here to bring to our attention that our communication matters in more ways than one. Marriage is not just an exercise in good natural skills and manners. We recognize that our world—including our marriage and family—are affected by spiritual laws. One important spiritual law has to do with the words we speak. So, speak in line with the Word of God. Do what God has taught us and use words correctly to bless your marriage and family.

APPLICATION

In the light of what we have covered in this chapter, reflect on the following:

- 1) In your experience of communicating with each other so far, are there things the other person does / does not do with relation to communication that disturbs you? Please discuss. [Example: The wife may feel that the husband sometimes “puts her down” with his remarks / comments, or vice versa. Bring this up, discuss the matter, and the other person works on changing.]

- 2) If there are any issues on any matter [Example: Influence of parents, past relationships, personal habits, interaction with the opposite sex, finances, standard of living, etc.] that are being suppressed, please bring it up and discuss these through so that they do not remain an unaddressed area in your relationship.

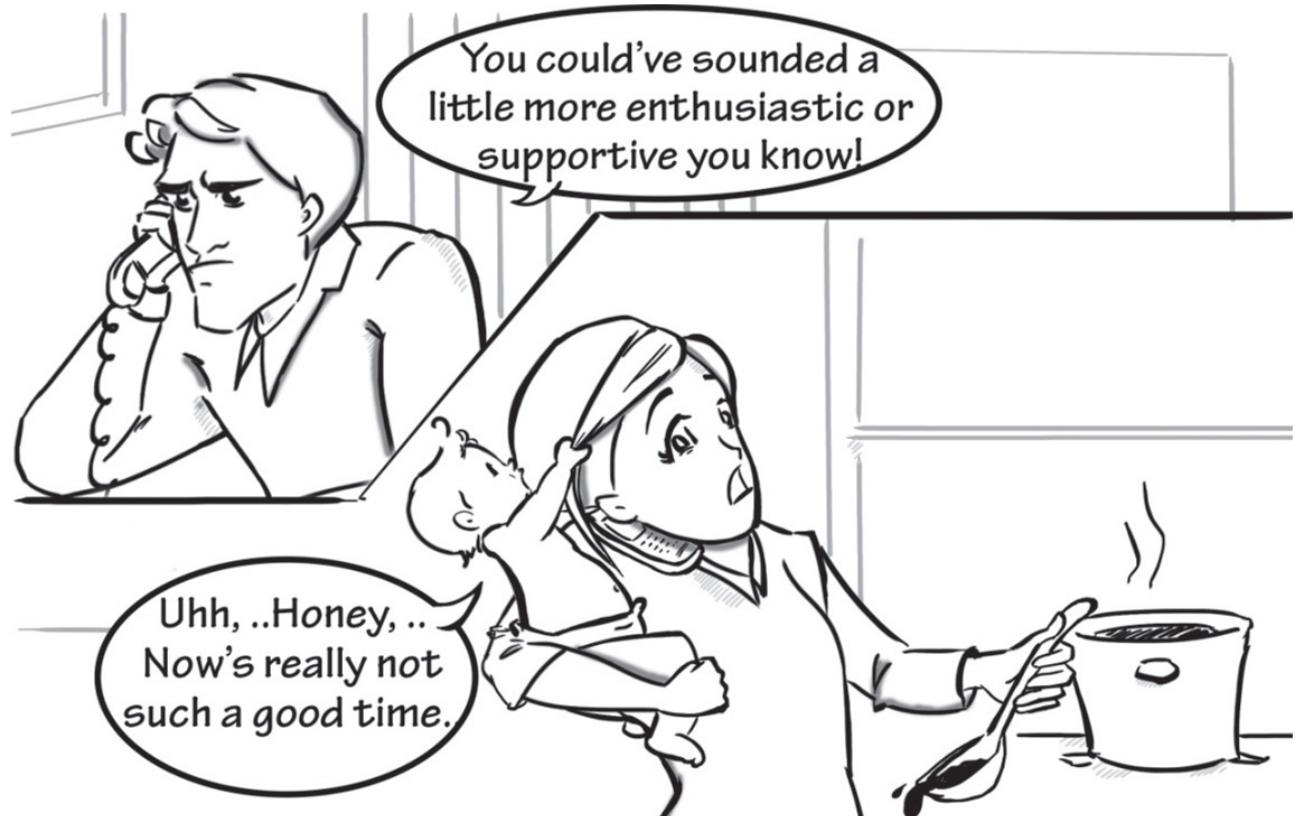
TURNING POINT

Pray over the following for your own life.

Pray over your life that God will give you the grace to always speak positively and in a way that builds your spouse up. Ask God for wisdom when you speak to know how to speak the right words at the right time.

ACTION ITEM

For the next week, every day, during your time of prayer (personal devotion), make five positive declarations over your spouse based on God's Word. It could be simple statements of faith such as, *My husband is blessed and is a blessing to me. God blesses my husband in all that he does and surrounds him with favor, blessing, and protection. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of wisdom, understanding, counsel, power, knowledge and of the fear of the Lord, and the Holy Spirit works powerfully in and through my husband. My husband is born of God and he overcomes the world and every temptation of the enemy. God always causes my husband to triumph in Christ.* (You can make the same declarations about your wife). Make it a practice to continue making declarations of God's Word over your spouse.



7

MANAGING YOUR HOME

In this chapter, we provide simple practical tips on managing one's home and having a family. It takes wisdom and understanding to build a home. The knowledge one gains through learning will help make the home a wonderful one.

Proverbs 24:3,4 (GNT)

³ Homes are built on the foundation of wisdom and understanding.

⁴ Where there is knowledge, the rooms are furnished with valuable, beautiful things.

Proverbs 24:6 (GNT)

After all, you must make careful plans before you fight a battle, and the more good advice you get, the more likely you are to win.

While information presented in this chapter may seem common knowledge, we would like to specifically address problem areas that we see in marriages from our part of the world. The better advice and learning you can get, the more likely you are to succeed.

Staying independently

Genesis 2:24 (GNT)

That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united with his wife, and they become one.

It is important for couples to agree on where they will make their home. Ideally, these things should be discussed before the wedding during the premarital preparation phase. It is always good for married couples to live by themselves, separate from parents and immediate family so that they have their freedom to focus and build their marriage relationship. We encourage this especially in the early years of marriage where the newly wedded couple are beginning to get to know and understand each other.

However, if a couple plans to live with either side of the family (husband's or wife's), then there must be a mutual understanding and agreement to do so. Or if any immediate family member is going to be living long-term with the married couple, here again, this should be discussed and mutually agreed upon. In some situations where either the husband's or wife's parents are widowed, or siblings have special needs, it may be necessary and kind to stay long-term with the family. It is, of course, expected that other family members will not interfere in the husband-wife relationship. Several problems and conflicts happen simply because the parent(s) or relatives residing with the husband-wife interfere in the marriage relationship by dictating decisions, controlling schedules, and interfering with the way children are being brought up, etc.

There are times when a newly married couple may start out by staying at either the husband's or the wife's parents' home. This could be due to relocation, financial, or other practical reasons. However,

we strongly recommend that this period be kept short, and the newly married couple set up their own separate place to live as soon as possible so that they can have freedom to focus on the marriage.

Daily and weekly schedules

A common occurrence today in many families is that both husband and wife are working professionals. It becomes challenging when husband and wife have different work schedules and / or long hours of work. This obviously minimizes the time they have together and therefore, impacts their marriage. Such situations must be addressed with wisdom giving priority to the marriage and family. Plan to schedule time to be together during the week and weekends. If it is financially viable, it would be advisable to make suitable changes so that there is sufficient time for marriage, the home, and family. This could mean that one person changes to a job that requires reduced hours or even temporarily takes a break from work for a period.

Cooking, cleaning, laundry, grocery shopping, paying bills

It is important for husband and wife to share the responsibilities of managing a home. There are many things that need to get done on a daily and weekly basis. These tasks can be shared between husband and wife, and where possible, household helpers. It is rather unfair, when both husband and wife are working outside the home professionally, for the wife to carry the full load of household tasks herself with the husband providing no help at home. This puts a lot of strain on the wife. There will be additional responsibilities when children come along. Here again, caring for children and their needs should be appropriately shared between husband and wife. It is best when husband and wife see themselves as a team and work together, each one doing their part, and helping the other when there is a need.

Mobile phone, television, and social media etiquette

Most of us feel the pressure to stay connected to work even after we have finished our day's work and have "left for the day." So, our mobile phones become our mobile office and start eating away at whatever time we have at home. Similarly, other recreational channels such as television and social media tend to take away our time. Hence, it is important to have certain disciplines about the use of your smart phone, television, engaging in instant messages, emails, calls, and social media during your time at home which should be spent with your spouse and children. As far as possible, keep your gadgets and other distractions away, and give your family undivided attention during your time together. We realize that there could be emergency situations where calls may need to be attended, but as part of your normal routine, your family time needs to be protected.

Family recreation and family vacations

It is also important to plan for things you would do as recreation together and plan time for family vacations. Each one has different ways of doing this. Recreation time could be anything that you can do together as a family, whether eating out, shopping together, going to the park, visiting places of interest, family movies, sports, outdoor activities, etc.

Share with each other things you enjoy doing personally as rest, relaxation, and recreation. Identify things that you can do together. You may also identify new activities that you can do together.

Plan ahead in terms of dates, places, and finances for family vacations once or twice a year.

Money, budgeting, and financial planning

Money is one of the most common areas of conflict in marriages. Regardless of how much money you may have, you could differ in what each of you feels about how money should be used. You may have different values and ideas about money based on how you were raised, the lifestyle you were accustomed to, what you saw your family do with money, and your personal walk with God. It is therefore, important to understand each other in this area and come to a place of agreement.

Money could mean different things to each one. Money could affect a person's sense of security. Freely sharing financial information could be an expression of trust. Having control over personal finances could provide a sense of independence. Having extra funds could help someone experience the joy of giving to others.

Here is a quick exercise to identify some key values you hold about money and possessions. Complete this table, share and discuss this with your spouse (fiancé). Of course, you can adapt and change your views about money and the importance it holds in your life over time. This exercise is just to indicate where things are presently.

Indicate your view using a scale of 1 to 5.

1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = not sure, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree

Description	Score
I have been tithing into church regularly and will continue to do so.	
I have been giving more than my tithes into God's Kingdom regularly.	
I really enjoy being generous and giving to others in financial need.	
To me, having a lot of money is a sign of success.	
To me, my social status is determined by the things I own (vehicle, property, appliances).	
Things I own serve only a functional purpose and do not influence my status.	
I prefer branded products for clothes, footwear, and personal items.	
It is important that I have a lifestyle similar or better than what I grew up with.	
Having substantial savings is important to me.	
I prefer saving money than making purchase of luxury items.	
I am comfortable sharing all my financial information with my spouse.	
I prefer having separate bank accounts than putting all my money into a joint account.	
I like to see our finances and the things we purchase as being "ours" rather than "yours" and "mine".	

Agree to tithe and give into God's Kingdom

Also, agree together to tithe according to Malachi 3:8-10, and to give additionally into the Lord's work as God enables you. Include this in your budget and do this first before spending on other things.

Proverbs 3:9,10

- ⁹Honor the LORD with your possessions, And with the firstfruits of all your increase;
¹⁰So your barns will be filled with plenty, And your vats will overflow with new wine.

Handle your finances prayerfully. Learn to live with contentment, free from greed, without comparing, or giving in to the pressure to keep up with other people. Live with simplicity. Be thankful. Be generous. Serve God's purposes with your money.

Develop a budget

Decide together how the financial needs of the family will be taken care of. If only the husband is earning, then the husband provides for the financial needs. However, if both husband and wife are earning, then you need to decide who covers what expenses and how your income will be shared to manage the home. It is important for husband and wife, if both are earning, to share information about their income and jointly develop a plan to share in household expenses.

Given below is a sample of how you can itemize your income, giving, taxes, and expenses, and plan out a simple budget. You can modify this to be specific to your situation.

In Rupees			
Category	Suggested Percentage	Monthly Amount	Annual Amount
Monthly Gross Income:		₹ 200,000.00	
Monthly Tithe:		₹ 20,000.00	
Offerings/Other Contributions:		₹ 10,000.00	
Monthly Tax Deducted:		₹ 50,000.00	
In Rupees			
Net Spendable Income:*		₹ 120,000.00	₹ 1,440,000.00
Housing:	30%	₹ 36,000.00	₹ 432,000.00
Food:	12%	₹ 14,400.00	₹ 172,800.00
Vehicle:	12%	₹ 14,400.00	₹ 172,800.00
Insurance:	5%	₹ 6,000.00	₹ 72,000.00
Clearing previous debt if any: **	5%	₹ 6,000.00	₹ 72,000.00
Entertainment/ Recreation: **	6%	₹ 7,200.00	₹ 86,400.00
Clothing:	5%	₹ 6,000.00	₹ 72,000.00
Savings and Investments:	10%	₹ 12,000.00	₹ 144,000.00
Medical:	4%	₹ 4,800.00	₹ 57,600.00
Misc: **	5%	₹ 6,000.00	₹ 72,000.00
School/Childcare:**	6%	₹ 7,200.00	₹ 86,400.00
Other	0%	₹ 0.00	₹ 0.00
	100%	₹ 120,000.00	₹ 1,440,000.00

*NSI is left after you give to the Lord and pay taxes. The NSI is what you must live on.

** These categories are added as a guide only. If you have this expense, the percentage shown must be deducted from other budget categories. Remember, all percentages must add up to 100%. If any category is not used, this amount can be moved toward your savings and investments. Adapted from www.crown.org

There are three primary categories in every person's budget—housing, food, and vehicle. If these three combined percentages exceed 70 % of your NSI, then it will be almost impossible to have a balanced budget. The average person usually has no idea how much he or she is spending annually or monthly. The first step, then, is to track what you spend and compare it to the guidelines shown here. Only then should you begin to adjust your budget to make it balance. For some, it may mean selling assets to pay down debt, and for others, it may mean seeking assistance with debt reduction from a trained counselor. Still others may find that they have surpluses in areas of their budget. For them, the challenge is deciding where to allocate this surplus—to retirement, college planning, or increased giving.

If both husband and wife are earning, you can include an additional column to determine who contributes toward each expense and / or what percentage of that expense.

Agree on short-term and long-term financial goals

One of the ways to understand each other's expectations and to preempt arguments over finances is to agree on short-term and long-term financial goals. Short-term goals are typically financial objectives that you would like to see happen in the next 6 to 12 months. These could be paying off smaller loans, making necessary purchases for household appliances, and so on. Long-term goals are financial objectives that will take more than 12 months to accomplish. These could include saving money for buying a home, children's education, special travel / vacation, starting a business venture, and so on.

You can work through this simple exercise where each writes down his / her personal short-term and long-term financial goals. Then share your goals with one another. Identify where you have similar goals and where you differ. Then decide together as a couple on what you will set as common goals for your family. Then discuss how each can contribute toward achieving these goals. Evaluate from time to time your progress toward these goals.

My personal short-term financial goals (6-12 months)

My personal long-term financial goals (12 months and beyond)

Our common financial goals and plans on how we will get there	
Short-term goals (6-12 months)	Long-term goals (12 months and beyond)
Plan on how we will get there:	Plan on how we will get there:

Saving and investing

Proverbs 13:22

**A good man leaves an inheritance to his children's children,
But the wealth of the sinner is stored up for the righteous.**

Saving and investing is key to any good financial management plan. It is making money work for you. We also encourage you to consider saving and investing systematically. There are several ways you can invest money and make it grow.

- Insurance plans
- Public provident fund (PPF) / Employee provident fund (EPF)
- Equity / Mutual funds
- Bank fixed deposits
- Real estate
- Post office savings schemes
- Bonds / debentures
- Gold / commodity investments

Consult a reliable financial advisor who can help you with this.

Parents, in-laws, and extended family

Proverbs 18:19 (GNB)

**Help your relatives and they will protect you like a strong city wall,
but if you quarrel with them, they will close their doors to you.**

Proverbs 19:26

**He who mistreats his father and chases away his mother
Is a son who causes shame and brings reproach.**

Proverbs 20:20

**Whoever curses his father or his mother,
His lamp will be put out in deep darkness.**

Proverbs 23:24,25 (GNT)

²⁴ A righteous person's parents have good reason to be happy. You can take pride in a wise child.

²⁵ Let your father and mother be proud of you; give your mother that happiness.

Ephesians 6:2,3

² "Honor your father and mother," which is the first commandment with promise:

³ "that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth."

While we have emphasized earlier the importance of husband and wife living independently without the interference of parents or family members, we are in no way advocating disconnecting or distancing oneself from family. The Scriptures are very clear in instructing us to honor parents and bless them. So wherever possible, maintain healthy family relationships with your own parents and the parents of your spouse and continue to bless them. Continue to maintain healthy relationships with other family members as well. It is important that the love of Christ be seen through you in how you relate to your own parents and extended family.

In some cases, younger couples may have to support parents financially to some extent and help take care of their material needs. As husband and wife, do this with mutual understanding and supporting one another as you do it. Do this without partiality, treating parents on both sides equally.

Caring for the elderly, widowed, or orphaned in your own family**Proverbs 23:22 (The Message)**

Listen with respect to the father who raised you, and when your mother grows old, don't neglect her.

Proverbs 30:11,17 (GNT)

¹¹ There are people who curse their fathers and do not show their appreciation for their mothers.

¹⁷ If you make fun of your father or despise your mother in her old age, you ought to be eaten by vultures or have your eyes picked out by wild ravens.

Isaiah 58:6,7 (GNT)

⁶ "The kind of fasting I want is this: Remove the chains of oppression and the yoke of injustice, and let the oppressed go free.

⁷ Share your food with the hungry and open your homes to the homeless poor. Give clothes to those who have nothing to wear, and do not refuse to help your own relatives.

James 1:27 (GNT)

What God the Father considers to be pure and genuine religion is this: to take care of orphans and widows in their suffering and to keep oneself from being corrupted by the world.

Finally, we must recognize that life brings with it its own challenges. As parents age, there may be the need to care for them or other elderly family members, widowed parents, or those who are orphaned. We cannot neglect their needs and turn away from those who are our own. As husband and wife, you can both agree together on how you will address such needs that you see in your extended family. Do this wholeheartedly, support one another when doing so, and do it as unto the Lord.

APPLICATION

In the light of what we have covered in this chapter, reflect on the following:

In this chapter, we have addressed nine areas of importance for your marriage and family in relation to managing your home. These are listed below. Ensure that you have discussed these with your spouse (fiancé) and both of you understand what you have agreed to do and what to expect of each other.

- 1) Staying independently
- 2) Daily and weekly schedules
- 3) Cooking, cleaning, laundry, grocery shopping, paying bills
- 4) Mobile phone, television, and social media etiquette
- 5) Family recreation and family vacations
- 6) Money, budgeting, and financial planning
- 7) Saving and investing
- 8) Parents, in-laws, and extended family
- 9) Caring for the elderly, widowed, or orphaned in your own family

TURNING POINT

Pray over the following for your own life.

Pray for God's wisdom and guidance to do the right thing in each of the nine areas we have addressed in managing your home.

ACTION ITEM

If needed, set up an appointment with a financial advisor to get help with managing your finances, budgeting, financial planning, saving, and investing.



8

SEX AND SEXUALITY

Sexual intimacy and enjoying a healthy sex life are exciting and important parts of marriage. We discuss a few insights and instructions given to us in the Scripture and refer to some useful resources for practical advice on enjoying fulfilling and exciting sexual intimacy in your marriage.

God designed sex

Hebrews 13:4 (The Message)

Honor marriage, and guard the sacredness of sexual intimacy between wife and husband. God draws a firm line against casual and illicit sex.

God designed sex and gifted it to us to be enjoyed within a marriage relationship. There is sacredness in sexual intimacy because it was designed by God.

God also warns us against casual or illicit sex, that is sex outside the boundaries of a marriage relationship. As a young person, you need to manage your sexual desires, protect, and keep it pure to be enjoyed after your marriage with your spouse.

It is quite possible that a young person may have fallen into sexual sin or become sexually active before marriage. It is important to repent of this, receive God's mercy, forgiveness, deliverance, and empowering grace to walk in sexual purity from this moment on. The Holy Spirit is powerful and He will not only set a person free from an immoral lifestyle but also bring complete cleansing, healing, and freedom so that the person can walk free and prepare for a married life that is pure and holy before God.

God designed sex for procreation and enjoyment

1 Corinthians 7:1-6 (The Message)

¹Now, getting down to the questions you asked in your letter to me. First, Is it a good thing to have sexual relations?

²Certainly - but only within a certain context. It's good for a man to have a wife, and for a woman to have a husband. Sexual drives are strong, but marriage is strong enough to contain them and provide for a balanced and fulfilling sexual life in a world of sexual disorder.

³The marriage bed must be a place of mutuality - the husband seeking to satisfy his wife, the wife seeking to satisfy her husband.

⁴Marriage is not a place to "stand up for your rights." Marriage is a decision to serve the other, whether in bed or out.

⁵Abstaining from sex is permissible for a period of time if you both agree to it, and if it's for the purposes of prayer and fasting - but only for such times. Then come back together again. Satan has an ingenious way of tempting us when we least expect it.

⁶I'm not, understand, commanding these periods of abstinence - only providing my best counsel if you should choose them.

Part of being married is the joy of sexual union between husband and wife. Part of the role of husband and wife involves sexual intimacy.

The Scripture encourages us to

- Maintain a balanced and fulfilling sex life (v.2). Husband and wife decide on the frequency and rhythm with which they enjoy sexual intimacy. Sexual life must be fulfilling, rewarding, and satisfying to both.
- Sex must be enjoyed with mutuality, each seeking to satisfy the other (v.3). The husband seeks to satisfy his wife, and wife seeks to satisfy her husband. For example, in sexual intimacy, the husband is not just looking for personal release and gratification. He needs to engage with his wife with the intent of satisfying her, ensuring she enjoys pleasure as well.
- Sex is an opportunity for husband and wife to enjoy each other's bodies and must not be used to "hold something back" (v.4). Do not use your body as a weapon against your spouse by withholding sex.
- Husband and wife can agree to abstain from sex for a short period of time for prayer and fasting (v.5).
- The devil uses the areas of sexuality as an area of attack and hence, we need to be on guard in this area. Enjoying a fulfilling sex life is one important way to keep husband and wife secure in this area (v.5).

Proverbs 5:15-19

- ¹⁵ Drink water from your own cistern,
And running water from your own well.
¹⁶ Should your fountains be dispersed abroad,
Streams of water in the streets?
¹⁷ Let them be only your own,
And not for strangers with you.
¹⁸ Let your fountain be blessed,
And rejoice with the wife of your youth.
¹⁹ As a loving deer and a graceful doe,
Let her breasts satisfy you at all times;
And always be enraptured with her love.

This passage brings specific instruction on physical intimacy.

- The husband needs to focus his sexual affections toward his own wife.
- The husband must derive sexual fulfillment and satisfaction from his own wife.
- The husband delights in his own wife's body and derives all pleasure and delight with her love.
- The wife lavishes her love toward her husband.

Among other things, sex has been designed by God for our pleasure. Take time to enjoy each other and satisfy each other. Sex is not about what you can get, but also the pleasure you can give to your spouse.

Sex is an expression of commitment, intimacy, pleasure

1 Corinthians 6:16-20 (The Message)

¹⁶ There's more to sex than mere skin on skin. Sex is as much spiritual mystery as physical fact. As written in Scripture, "The two become one."

¹⁷ Since we want to become spiritually one with the Master, we must not pursue the kind of sex that avoids commitment and intimacy, leaving us more lonely than ever - the kind of sex that can never "become one."

¹⁸ There is a sense in which sexual sins are different from all others. In sexual sin we violate the sacredness of our own bodies, these bodies that were made for God-given and God-modeled love, for "becoming one" with another.

¹⁹ Or didn't you realize that your body is a sacred place, the place of the Holy Spirit? Don't you see that you can't live however you please, squandering what God paid such a high price for? The physical part of you is not some piece of property belonging to the spiritual part of you.

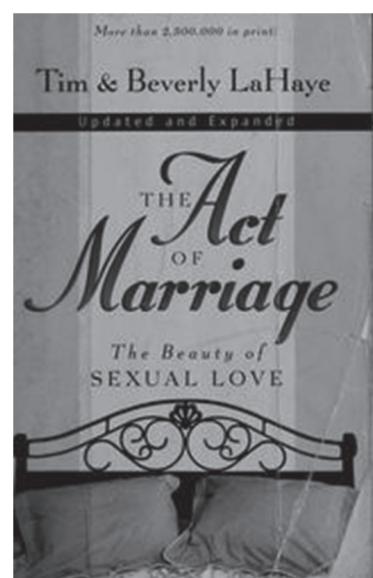
²⁰ God owns the whole works. So let people see God in and through your body.

- Sex is a spiritual mystery and not a mere physical act. Sex expresses the fact that husband and wife have become one.
- Sex in order to be enjoyed to the full must include commitment and intimacy.
- Sex between husband and wife honors God, the bodies He designed, and the marriage which He instituted.
- God owns you—spirit, soul, and body. The Holy Spirit inhabits husband and wife even during their sexual union sanctifying and making sacred this physical act.

For the first night and after

For couples getting ready for their wedding, it is best to prepare yourselves well for your first night. In all your preparation for the wedding, don't forget to prepare for the wedding night. The first night can be awkward so take your time to understand each other.

As part of preparation for your wedding night and beyond, we recommend this book, *The Act of Marriage: The Beauty of Sexual Love (Revised Edition)*, Tim and Beverly LaHaye.



Simple yet important practices for sexual intimacy

- Use personal lubricant if needed so that dryness does not cause pain.
- Oral hygiene—clean your mouth, brush, or use mouthwash.
- Personal hygiene—have a bath if you are not clean. Use deodorant or perfume.
- Shave if you have stubbles as these can be abrasive to your wife's skin.

- For those with full beards, you may need to use shampoo / conditioner to keep it soft.
- Toilet paper, small towel, or wipes to use during or after sex.
- Condoms or your choice of contraceptive, if needed.
- Simple clothing. Remember the husband is especially stimulated by what he sees.
- Suitable lighting that both are comfortable with or when possible, lightly scented candles.
- Privacy—keep your door locked and phones turned off.
- Comfortable room temperature. If it's too cold, you'll want to stay under the covers.
- Use suitable music when possible if both like this.

Personal health and hygiene

- Keep yourself physically fit by eating healthy and exercising regularly. You cannot enjoy sex if you are tired or emotionally drained.
- As mentioned in the earlier section, maintain good personal hygiene. Your spouse may find it difficult to enjoy sex if you are sweaty and smelly. Keep yourself clean.
- Understand your wife's menstrual cycle and wait till her cycle is over.

Managing personal sexuality

- Direct all your sexual affections toward your spouse alone.
- Refuse the deceiving thought that you need to find sexual fulfillment through other means. Refuse sexual fantasies, pornography, or anything that is dishonorable before God.
- Pray over and consecrate your sexual affections before God and dedicate them for your spouse. This is honoring God and your spouse with your body.

Deciding when to have children

Malachi 2:15 (The Message)

God, not you, made marriage. His Spirit inhabits even the smallest details of marriage. And what does he want from marriage? Children of God, that's what. So guard the spirit of marriage within you. Don't cheat on your spouse.

God desires to see godly offspring raised out of the union of husband and wife. It is good therefore, for a married couple (and for those preparing for marriage) to discuss the following and arrive at a place of agreement.

Pregnancy and childbirth

- Discuss when you would like to have children, and how many.
- Discuss the measures you will take to avoid pregnancy until such time.

- What measures you would take to avoid further pregnancy once you have had the desired number of children?

Infertility

- Decide what you would do in the case of miscarriage or infertility. The most important thing to do is to believe God for an answer.
- Do not make infertility or impotence of your spouse a reason to end the marriage.

Abortion

- Understand that abortion is not acceptable to God and must be allowed only when life is in danger.

When you, or your spouse, loses interest in sex

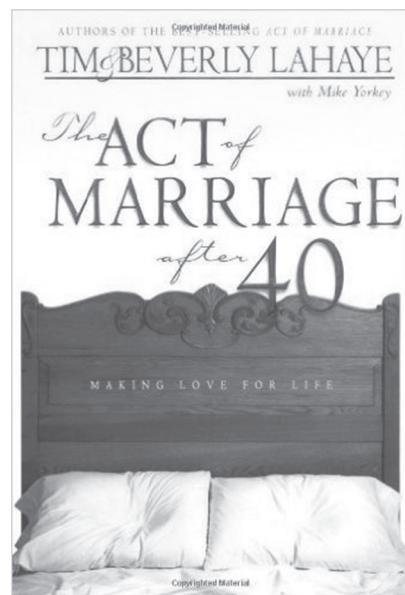
There can be several reasons why either the husband or wife tends to lose interest in sex. Busyness, stress, physical problems, emotional distress, feeling unloved, or breakdown in emotional intimacy are just some possible causes. A man typically never outgrows his need for sex. A woman, however, needs to feel loved by her husband before she can really enjoy sexual intimacy. Don't let the joy of sexual intimacy die out. If the flame begins to wane, talk about this with your spouse and do what is needed to rekindle sexual intimacy so long as it is physically possible.

Also, remember the importance of physical and verbal affection. Always be generous in physical affection and not just during foreplay before sexual intercourse. Hug your wife, hold her hand when you are walking, touch her lovingly, rub your wife's back—show physical affection whenever possible. Be kind, loving, and affectionate with your words. All of this is important to build a sense of being loved, which will then easily lend itself to an enjoyable sexual life.

Enjoying sex when you are 40 and beyond

With age, our bodies undergo physical change. Women go through menopause and men could have other challenges. However, if we keep our bodies healthy through exercise and eating right, we can, under normal conditions, enjoy good, fulfilling sexual lives well into our eighties. As Tim and Beverly LaHaye state in their book, “*The Act of Marriage after 40*,” “Affection, warmth, and sensuality do not have to deteriorate with age and can actually increase in the midlife years. Sex in later life is sex for its own sake since our childbearing years are in our rearview mirrors. We make love for pleasure, release, communication, and intimacy.”

They also address common misconceptions about sexual life after 40 such as losing the ability to make love or decline in the quality of sex after a certain age; women losing their desire for sex after menopause, or youthful orgasms being better than those at a later stage in life.



Recommended reading

LaHaye, Tim, Beverly LaHaye, and Mike Yorkey. *The Act of Marriage After 40: Making Love for Life*. Zondervan, 2019.

APPLICATION

In the light of what we have covered in this chapter, reflect on the following:

- 1) For married couples:** Share with each other what you have really enjoyed thus far in physical affection and sexual intimacy between the two of you.
- 2) For couples going through premarital preparation:** At the right time (a month or two before your wedding), as part of your preparation, discuss the content in the following sections in this chapter.
 - For the first night and after
 - Simple yet important practices for sexual intimacy
 - Personal health and hygiene
 - Deciding when to have children

TURNING POINT

Pray over the following for your own life.

Pray together and consecrate your sexual desires and your life of sexual intimacy to God. Pray God's blessing on this area of your life asking that you will enjoy sexual intimacy as God intended.

ACTION ITEM

Try to obtain copies of the recommended book(s) that are relevant to your stage in your married life and read through it.

9

BECOMING A TEAM

In many ways, husband and wife constitute a team and should work as a team. Knowing that you as husband and wife are together, on the same side, and can count on each other is a great source of encouragement and strength. You can face and overcome life's challenges together. In this chapter, we explore the power of being a team and present some practical perspectives on becoming a strong team for the purposes of God's Kingdom here on earth.

The power of two

Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 (GNT)

⁹Two are better off than one, because together they can work more effectively.

¹⁰If one of them falls down, the other can help him up. But if someone is alone and falls, it's just too bad, because there is no one to help him.

¹¹If it is cold, two can sleep together and stay warm, but how can you keep warm by yourself

¹²Two people can resist an attack that would defeat one person alone. A rope made of three cords is hard to break.

While this passage is not specific to marriage, it definitely can be applied in the context of the marriage relationship where husband and wife have the opportunity to become a powerful team.

Together, husband and wife

- can be more effective (v.9) having bigger impact, being more efficient, having an increased measure of success,
- can help each other in case one "falls down" (v.10),
- can provide mutual support and encouragement when times are challenging (v.11), and
- can experience enhanced strength and power to resist attacks and withstand pressure (v.12).

Matthew 18:19,20 (GNT)

¹⁹"And I tell you more: whenever two of you on earth agree about anything you pray for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven.

²⁰For where two or three come together in my name, I am there with them."

When husband and wife agree, there is power. They can see great success in prayer and become a place for His dwelling and become carriers of His presence.

Husband and wife should work on developing togetherness and being able to flow together as a team in the things they do at home for the family and possibly in other areas of life as well.

- 1) They bring the power of two, the power of togetherness to bear upon their own lives, marriage, and for each other. This obviously has a great impact on their personal strength, level of confidence, their spiritual and emotional well-being.
- 2) This also brings blessing to their children, home, and family. The home becomes a place of unity and strength. Children are nurtured in a healthy and supportive environment where they see their parents working as a team. This sets a great example to them as well on teamwork, caring, loving sacrifice, and service.
- 3) And as husband and wife grow into becoming a good team, they can definitely serve God's purpose more effectively and see the advancement of God's Kingdom through the gifts and callings God has placed in their lives.

Hindrances to becoming a good team

Mark 3:25

And if a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand.

Husband and wife who are against each other will eventually see their marriage disintegrate. Here are some factors that keep husband and wife from becoming a good team.

- **Self-preservation:** When the husband or wife goes his or her own way, always wanting to take care of his or her own things (career, finances, parents, possessions), and self-preservation becomes the major motive, the team eventually disintegrates. They see things as "mine" versus "ours" and seek to take care of what is "mine." Both husband and wife need to stop seeing things as his / hers versus ours, and instead share and hold everything in common. Learn to give equal importance to both sides of the family. Get rid of a "mine" and "yours" mentality and change to an "us, we, ours" mentality.
- **Selfishness:** When one or both spouses focus on their selfish interests instead of what would be mutually beneficial for the marriage and family, teamwork becomes secondary or even non-existent. Both husband and wife must learn to give their marriage and family its rightful place of importance and work their personal ambitions and dreams around this.
- **Competition:** If husband and wife are constantly trying to outdo the other, leading to an unhealthy competition internally, they find it difficult to work as a team. See your spouse as your teammate and not as your opponent. This will help you grow closer and stronger in your relationship.
- **Pride:** "I am better than you or you are not good enough for me." Discard every condescending thought or attitude. Learn to walk as equals respecting each other's strengths and supporting each other in areas of weakness.
- **Blaming instead of taking responsibility:** When there are problems or conflicts, don't put the blame on the other. Recognize that there are faults on both sides, not just one. Hence, change and correction must happen on both sides.

- **Problem-focused instead of finding solutions:** It is important to identify problem areas. But don't just talk about the problems, work toward solutions.

What makes a good husband-wife team?

Psalm 133:1-3 (GNT)

- ¹How wonderful it is, how pleasant,
for God's people to live together in harmony!
²It is like the precious anointing oil
running down from Aaron's head and beard,
down to the collar of his robes.
³It is like the dew on Mount Hermon,
falling on the hills of Zion.
That is where the Lord has promised his blessing—
life that never ends.

The place of unity and harmony is the place of God's pleasure. God is pleased to see people dwell in unity. He releases His anointing, the presence and power of His Holy Spirit there. Like the dew, the place of unity becomes a place of refreshing, renewing, and reviving. The place of unity is the place where God commands blessing and life.

- When husband and wife make every effort to walk in such unity and harmony, they walk in the blessings promised in Psalm 133.
- When husband and wife understand each other, they respect their differences, different opinions, and perspectives.
- When husband and wife understand each other's roles and support each other, they know what each other will do based on their strengths. They step in and support the other in areas where help is needed. They work to complement each other and not to compete.
- Husband and wife can share interests and pursue common goals. These could be spiritual pursuits, intellectual pursuits, other activities, or larger purposes in life.
- Both work at being good team players instead of individual stars.
 - When possible, they do things together instead of independently. They connect on multiple levels as possible—emotional, intellectual, physical, recreational, work, spiritual, etc.
 - They can communicate, evaluate, and decide on things together.
 - They accept critique of their ideas without feeling hurt or rejected.
 - They are not defensive about their perspectives.
 - Each one delivers on their commitment and carries their part of the load.
 - They are not concerned which one of them gets the credit or recognition because in their minds, they are a team.

- They share in each other's strengths and hence, experience enhanced strength.
- They support each other to overcome weaknesses without finding fault and use even their weaknesses as an opportunity for togetherness.

Essential heart attitudes for teamwork in marriage

There are two important heart attitudes we like to address that are essential to teamwork in the context of marriage.

- 1) Having a servant heart
- 2) Mutual submission

Servant heart

Matthew 20:25-28 (The Message)

²⁵ So Jesus got them together to settle things down. He said, “You’ve observed how godless rulers throw their weight around, how quickly a little power goes to their heads.

²⁶ It’s not going to be that way with you. Whoever wants to be great must become a servant.

²⁷ Whoever wants to be first among you must be your slave.

²⁸ That is what the Son of Man has done: He came to serve, not be served - and then to give away his life in exchange for the many who are held hostage.”

John 13:14,15 (The Message)

¹⁴ So if I, the Master and Teacher, washed your feet, you must now wash each other’s feet.

¹⁵ I’ve laid down a pattern for you. What I’ve done, you do.

Philippians 2:3,4 (GNT)

³ Don’t do anything from selfish ambition or from a cheap desire to boast, but be humble toward one another, always considering others better than yourselves.

⁴ And look out for one another’s interests, not just for your own.

As the head (leader) of the marriage and family, the husband must also be a servant. This is also true for the wife. Both need to maintain a servant heart and serve instead of waiting to be served. We follow the Lord’s example and “wash one another’s feet,” that is, serve one another. Look out for each other’s interests and well-being. We serve to meet the other’s needs. This might require sacrifice at times. Husband and wife must maintain the heart of a servant to one another.

Mutual submission

Ephesians 5:21 (GNT)

Submit yourselves to one another because of your reverence for Christ.

While it is true that the Bible states that the husband is the head and the wife walks in submission to the husband, we also see the Scriptures teaching that all of us are to walk in submission to one another out of our reverence for Christ. While the husband is the head and the leader in the marriage, the wife may play a leading role in certain areas of the marriage and family. Or in decision-making, husband and wife discuss their ideas and then go with the best plan. This requires mutual submission where each yields to the other and what is best for the marriage and family.

Becoming a Kingdom team

We share some practical pointers here on how husband and wife can grow into becoming a team for Kingdom purposes, together releasing the purposes of God. We are not implying that husband and wife should both get into full-time Christian ministry or get into joint ventures or do the same things. By becoming a Kingdom team, we are emphasizing the fact that God has an individual call on husband and wife and has graced each one as He saw fit. The goal in becoming a Kingdom team is for husband and wife to support, encourage, and empower each other to fulfill what God has ordained for their lives. Husband and wife are a team working for the same purpose which is to extend the Kingdom of God through their lives as individuals, through their marriage and family, although the way in which this happens will depend on the calling and gifting God has placed in each of them.

One for a purpose

Recognize that God brought you together to become one for a purpose. We are one not only to benefit each other but also our family, our church community, and our Kingdom purpose to be released in the world around us.

The Genesis Commission (Genesis 1:28)—to be fruitful, multiply, to fill (replenish), to conquer (subdue), and to have dominion (rule) in the earth—was given to both men and women. Both husband and wife are to see God’s rule and reign extended through their lives.

Husband and wife are joint heirs in the Kingdom (1 Peter 3:7). Therefore, we share in Kingdom privileges and responsibilities, in Kingdom gifts and callings. We have equal Kingdom-worth. As we pursue Kingdom purposes, we need to ensure that both are equally supported, encouraged, and released to fulfill God’s purposes.

Discover your individual callings / vocation

We understand from Romans 12:4-6 and 1 Corinthians 12:18 that husband and wife, each have their individual place and function in the Body of Christ with differing gifts, anointing, and grace. The husband and wife may be gifted and anointed differently to fulfill their function in the Body of Christ. Rather than making one fit into the other’s mold, each one should become what God has designed them to be. If the wife is called to teach God’s Word and the husband has been gifted to be an administrator, don’t try to force the administrator to become a teacher. Encourage each one to discover and pursue God’s individual callings and vocation.

Blend your callings / vocation

We see that we are called to be one. Our difference in calling, gifting, and anointing are not to tear us apart or cause us to drift away from each other, instead husband and wife must learn how to blend and complement each other as they fulfill their calling in the Body of Christ. Any difference in function, calling, gifting, and anointing should not create division or competition in the marriage but be an opportunity to extend support and encouragement.

Support and encourage each other

Life is lived in seasons, and as you journey together in life, you will go through different seasons both as a couple / family as well as personally.

- It is important that you support and encourage each other as you personally journey through different seasons of life.
- Help each other transition from one season to the next. When one transitions from one season to the next, often, it would require that the other adapt and make changes to accommodate this transition. For example, if the wife chose to stay at home during the time when the children were young, and once the children are older, the wife transitions into a more active role outside the home (work or something else), then it could mean that the husband may need to make changes to his work schedule or to him sharing in household responsibilities in order to facilitate his wife stepping into a different season doing things out of the home.
- Do not impose what one is experiencing in their personal season onto the other. For example, if the husband is in a season of rapid spiritual growth while the wife is going through a season of reflection and consolidation with not much happening outwardly, it would be wrong for the husband to force the wife to do the same. God is dealing with the wife differently and the husband needs to recognize and support her through the season.
- Cheer and celebrate each other's growth and success as God brings about increase.

Don't live to impress people or live to satisfy people's expectations

As a husband-and-wife team, always be true to yourselves, to God, to each other, and to your family. Do not do things just for public appeal or to impress people. Avoid making public pretenses. Do not try to live to people's expectations. Be real. Live lives that are good examples and modeled according to the standards of God's Word. But do it because you love the Lord and desire to obey His Word and walk according to His Holy Spirit. Our only objective is to serve God faithfully and do what He has called us to do.

This is especially true when you are engaged in church or Christian ministry. People expect the pastor, his wife, and their children to behave a certain way and do certain things. Our goal must never be to give in to those expectations but live to please the Father in heaven.

Balancing priorities within your calling

Being a Kingdom couple and working as a team for Kingdom purposes does have its challenges. One of the big areas of challenge is in balancing priorities with work, home, and Christian ministry. Sometimes, professional work or Christian ministry can take us away so much from home that we tend to neglect our marriage and family. Hence, it is important to have constant checks and balances, and maintain proper priorities. Take time out for each other as husband and wife. Take time out for family. You can do this without any feeling of guilt and shame. God instituted marriage and family, and so when you are serving your spouse or children, you are actually "doing ministry" and are honoring God when you do so.

Pray together

Matthew 18:19,20 (GNT)

¹⁹“And I tell you more: whenever two of you on earth agree about anything you pray for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven.

²⁰For where two or three come together in my name, I am there with them.”

One of the most powerful things that helps husband and wife, and the family build togetherness is consistently coming together for prayer. Set up a time when you come together for prayer and include a time of reading God's Word, discussion, and worship. More on this later when we talk about the Family Altar.

Teamwork in nurturing children

Bringing up children is also teamwork. Typically, in our culture, we tend to leave the responsibility of nurturing and training children entirely to the wife or grandparents. Keep in mind that in Genesis 1:28, God blessed THEM and told THEM (Adam and Eve) to be fruitful and replenish the earth. Both husband and wife have a duty in the upbringing, training, and care of the child. This includes setting goals, priorities, discipline, and provision. We will discuss more on this in later chapters.

APPLICATION

In the light of what we have covered in this chapter, reflect on the following:

- 1) Each one, list out areas where you feel you can complement each other in life at home, work, ministry, etc. Discuss this with each other.

- 2) What are some things you see in your own life together that could potentially prevent both of you from becoming a team? How can both of you work together to eliminate these?

TURNING POINT

Pray over the following for your own life.

Pray together that God will help you become a stronger team both at home and for the purposes of the Kingdom of God.

ACTION ITEM

Work on one or two projects together and see how teamwork happens or does not happen between the two of you. Reflect. Evaluate. Discuss.

Examples:

- Take up a task needed to be done at your local church, and work on this project together.
- Cook a meal together for your parents starting right from planning the meal, shopping, all the way through to laying the food on the table. (Lady leads, man follows.)
- Clean the car (vehicle) together. (Man leads, lady follows.)



She slit the banana

He placed them in

She added a scoop of vanilla

He added a scoop of chocolate

She added a scoop of strawberry

He dunked in the wafer

We added lots of chocolate sauce

And... VOILA!! Banana Split!!

10

RESOLVING CONFLICTS

Proverbs 17:1

Better is a dry morsel with quietness,
Than a house full of feasting *with* strife.

Conflicts happen!

As married couples, we desire our marriages to be free of conflict and our homes to be filled with peace, quietness, joy, and blessing. While this is something we can pursue and journey into, the fact is that along the way, there will be times of conflict. Conflicts could be anything from simple disagreements to things that could be very intense, leading to anger, hurt, and pain. Conflict is common to all marriages. Therefore, our goal in marriage is not to be conflict-free, but to handle conflict correctly when it occurs. The choices you make during a conflict will either drive you apart or bind you together. One of the skills we need to develop in marriage is learning how to resolve conflicts and maintain peace.

Conflicts happen because we are different!

In many cases, conflicts happen not because one is right and the other is wrong but simply because as individuals, we are different.

Men and women are different

Information in this sub-section, “**Men and women are different**” has been derived from a paper “*Understanding the Difference Between Men and Women*” by Michael G. Conner, Psy.D, Clinical & Medical Psychologist, **OregonCounseling.org**.

To begin with, there are some innate differences between men and women. There are anatomical, physiological, and psychological differences between men and women. The anatomical differences are obvious. Physiologically, men usually have greater upper body strength and build muscle easily. The male skull is usually thicker and stronger. Women have four times more brain cells (neurons) connecting the right and left side of their brain. Men rely easily and more heavily on their left brain to solve one problem, one step at a time, while women make greater use of their right brain and frequently prefer to solve problems through multiple activities at a time.

[For additional information on physiological differences, see the WebMD article, “How Male and Female Brains Differ,” <http://www.webmd.com/balance/features/how-male-female-brains-differ> Accessed September 2015]

Then there are psychological differences that affect problem-solving, thinking, memory, and sensitivity. While these are generalizations, it is useful to know that these differences exist and take these into account in relationships.

1) Problem solving

While both men and women solve problems equally well, their approach to problem-solving differs. Women emphasize how a problem is solved and for them, the process of solving a problem is important. They see the problem-solving process as an opportunity to share, discuss, interact, and strengthen relationships with the person they are talking with. For men, solving the problem in the most efficient, quickest, and the best way is important. It demonstrates competence, skill, strength, and their commitment to a relationship. How the problem is solved or the quality of relationships during the problem-solving process is secondary for men.

2) Thinking

Men and women consider and process information differently. Women tend to be intuitive, global thinkers considering multiple sources of information simultaneously, and viewing elements in the task in terms of their **interconnectedness** and interdependence. This may sometimes lead to a woman becoming overwhelmed with complexities that “exist,” or may seem to exist. Men tend to focus on one problem at a time or a limited number of problems at a time, process things linearly or sequentially, and see elements in a task less interconnected and more independent. They live life in boxes and tend to **compartmentalize**. Men are hence prone to minimize complexities that may exist and fail to appreciate subtleties that could be crucial. This difference in thinking has been contrasted in the title of a book *“Men Are Like Waffles, Women Are Like Spaghetti”* (Bill and Pam Farrell, 2001).

These differences in thinking are only tendencies and not absolutes as men and women can and do solve problems in a similar manner.

3) Memory

Women have an enhanced ability to recall memories that have **strong emotional components** recalling events or experiences that have similar emotions in common or have a common emotional theme. Men tend to recall events using strategies that rely on **reconstructing the experience** in terms of tasks or activities, competition, or challenges that took place.

4) Sensitivity

Women tend to be more sensitive and reactive than men and, in some cases, this could have a physiological basis. In part, sensitivity gives us our capacity to appreciate, build, and maintain meaningful relationships. For most men, strong relationships are forged through **shared activities, doing things together, much of which is active and physical**. Women on the other hand have a preference to first build meaningful relationships through **communication, sharing of thoughts, perspectives, and emotions**. Men may find such sharing of information uncomfortable and sometimes, overwhelming.

In discussing these differences, our goal is to be able to recognize, understand, and act correctly. Understand how and why your spouse would think or act in a certain way. Don’t criticize your spouse for being different or for looking at things or approaching things differently. When we fail to recognize and appreciate these differences, conflicts can arise leading to undue frustration, disappointment, hurt, and sometimes lead to a breakdown in the marriage relationship. We must learn to respect, love, and serve each other keeping these obvious differences in mind.

5) And then there are personal differences

Apart from the innate differences discussed so far, each of us as individuals have differences in many areas based on our upbringing, culture, life-experiences, and learning. These would include differences in perceptions, values, priorities, communication styles, tastes, emotional behavior, expressions, habits, and so on.

At the point where our differences are evident, if husband and wife perceive the difference incorrectly, conflicts arise. An incorrect view of differences would include perceiving the difference as an intentional disagreement, a challenge to their point of view, as something lacking or deficient in the other person, as insubordination, etc.

The Scripture teaches us to understand and value the differences between us and our spouse.

1 Peter 3:7 (GNT)

In the same way you husbands must live with your wives with the proper understanding that they are more delicate than you. Treat them with respect, because they also will receive, together with you, God's gift of life. Do this so that nothing will interfere with your prayers.

Conflicts in marriage can arise due to several other reasons. Sometimes, there could be interference by in-laws, financial matters, wrong behavior patterns, neglect of responsibilities, and so on.

Offended, hurt, and angry

When conflicts happen, there is the possibility that either one or both husband and wife get offended, feel violated, hurt, angry, and other emotions that need to be addressed.

Anger must be controlled

For many people, anger is the most common response when conflict occurs. While feeling angry is only natural and normal, anger must be controlled. We must not permit our anger to get the better of us leading us to say and do things that we regret later.

Reflect on what the following Scriptures teach us about anger, and reflect on how you would apply this Scripture personally.

What the Scriptures say...	How would you apply this personally?
Proverbs 14:17 (GNT) People with a hot temper do foolish things; wiser people remain calm.	
Proverbs 15:18 (GNT) Hot tempers cause arguments, but patience brings peace.	
Proverbs 29:22 (GNT) People with quick tempers cause a lot of quarreling and trouble.	
Ephesians 4:26,27 (GNT) ²⁶ If you become angry, do not let your anger lead you into sin, and do not stay angry all day. ²⁷ Don't give the Devil a chance.	

James 1:19,20 (GNT)	
¹⁹ Remember this, my dear friends! Everyone must be quick to listen, but slow to speak and slow to become angry.	
²⁰ Human anger does not achieve God's righteous purpose.	

When tempers flare, angry words and insults are hurled at each other leaving husband and wife hurt and in pain.

Anger in relationships questionnaire

This “Anger in Relationships” questionnaire is not intended to be a diagnostic tool but instead is meant to provide a better idea of how anger may be affecting your relationship. Rate the statements below to the best of your ability. Rate your answers as follows—“T” for true, “F” for false. [Adapted from www.sanjosecouplescounseling.com]

	Question	T / F
1)	I don't show anger about everything that makes me mad, but when I do—look out!	
2)	I still get angry when I think of the things that my spouse did to me in the past.	
3)	Waiting for my spouse when he / she is late really annoys me.	
4)	I fly off the handle with my spouse easily.	
5)	I often find myself having heated arguments with the people closest to me.	
6)	I sometimes lie awake at night and think about the things that upset me during the day.	
7)	When my spouse says or does something that upsets me, I don't usually say anything at the time, but later spend a lot of time thinking about what I should have said.	
8)	I find it very hard to forgive my spouse when he / she does something wrong.	
9)	I get angry with myself when I have lost control of my emotions.	
10)	My spouse really irritates me when he / she doesn't behave the way he / she should.	
11)	If I get really upset about something, I have a tendency to feel sick later with a weak spell, headache, upset stomach, or diarrhea.	
12)	People I have trusted have let me down leaving me feeling angry or betrayed.	
13)	When things don't go my way, I get depressed.	
14)	I am apt to take frustration so badly that I cannot get it out of my mind.	
15)	I have been angry at times; I couldn't remember things I said or did.	
16)	After arguing with my spouse, I hate myself.	
17)	I've lost relationships because of my temper.	
18)	When I'm upset with my spouse, I often blurt out things that I later regret saying.	
19)	My spouse is afraid of my bad temper.	

20)	When I get angry, frustrated, or hurt, I comfort myself by eating or using alcohol or drugs.	
21)	When my spouse hurts or frustrates me, I want to get even.	
22)	I have got so angry at times that I have got physically violent, hitting other people, or breaking things.	
23)	At times, I have felt angry enough to kill.	
24)	Sometimes I feel so hurt and alone that I feel like committing suicide.	
25)	I am really an angry person and I know I need help learning to control my temper and anger because they have already caused me a lot of problems.	

Total count “True” ____

Total count “False” ____

If the number of “True” statements is significantly high, then there are root issues of anger that need to be addressed. Please take time to (A) Read through **Chapter 12 Emotional Healing and Wholeness** in APC’s FREE publication *“Ministering Healing & Deliverance.”* Pray through the prayer given in that chapter. (B) Meet with your pastor or counselor to help you work through this.

Press the pause button

When you see that your disagreement or conflict about a matter is slowly escalating into a heated argument, either the husband or wife or both, should “press” the PAUSE button. Bring things to a pause. Step away from what is happening. Then apply the **“seven steps to resolving conflicts”** given in this chapter. It is best to practice these seven steps before things have become heated causing hurt and pain. In any case, even if things have already “gone out of hand,” take a step back, and after things have calmed down, work through the seven steps.

Avoid avoidance

Once conflicts have led to anger, hurt, and pain, the wrong thing to do is to “pretend” things didn’t happen, and avoid the issue altogether. This leads to unresolved issues that begin to fester on the inside of either the husband or wife or both. It is like a volcano that may appear dormant on the outside but is active on the inside and waiting to erupt. This will only lead to more anger and intensity in future conflicts, and things will soon get out of hand. Attempting to suppress unresolved issues could also lead to isolation, withdrawal, and dissatisfaction with the marriage that could have other repercussions. Hence, the best thing to do is to address issues appropriately.

Stay away from unhelpful responses to conflicts

There are certain unhelpful ways to respond to conflicts that we must stay away from since they do not help reach a resolution.

- **Being aggressive:** A shouting match may clear the air but can cause a relationship to be damaged leaving one of the partners feeling beaten.
- **Bottling feelings:** Not bringing up the matter for an open discussion to resolve it can lead the issue to fester, which can come out later in strange places and ways.

- **Indirect approaches:** Saying everything is “fine” even when clearly it is not. Signaling hurt or disappointment through body language or facial expressions and treating the other partner as “unfeeling”.
- **Seeking external validation:** Avoiding talking about the conflict with your partner but discussing it with others and seeking validation.
- **Unforgiveness:** Unwillingness to forgive and holding on to strong emotions without letting go.
- **Using the silent treatment:** Refusing to communicate can stunt the growth of a marriage.

Engage in a mature way

- Emotions are nothing to be afraid of. God gave us emotions. They are signposts that help navigate the journey of marriage. Embrace the emotional expressions of your spouse by looking for the message behind the words. Describe how you feel and what you want and need, not what your partner feels, wants, or believes. In a marriage, honestly confronting emotions helps the couple work through a conflict.
- No name calling, insults, or putdowns. Putting your partner down or criticizing their character shows disrespect.
- No blaming. Blaming each other does not accomplish anything. Make a decision that your relationship is too important to destabilize with blame.
- Stay on the “here and now.” Stay in the present and resist the urge to rake up other issues from the past. If the past keeps coming up, it is likely that older issues have never been resolved.

Get help from a counselor or intermediary

If working through the seven steps below seems difficult, then it is best to seek the help of a counselor who works with both husband and wife together leading them through this seven-step process. As husband and wife, you need to go through this together and get the help you need. Once you have walked through this process and learned how to resolve conflicts, you can then continue to practice conflict resolution on your own as and when situations arise.

Seven steps to resolving conflicts



These seven steps are not “magical,” but are simple instructions we see given to us in Scripture that apply to relationships. These are not necessarily specific to husband-wife relationships and hence, can be applied to resolving conflicts in all kinds of interpersonal relationships.

1) Pray and prepare your heart

First and foremost, we need to be right with God. This means our hearts must be right.

Matthew 12:34 (GNT)

... the mouth speaks what the heart is full of.

Matthew 15:19,20 (GNT)

¹⁹ For from your heart come the evil ideas which lead you to kill, commit adultery, and do other immoral things; to rob, lie, and slander others.

²⁰ These are the things that make you unclean. But to eat without washing your hands as they say you should—this doesn't make you unclean."

Go before God in prayer and confess to Him what you feel in your heart. Ask Him to cleanse you of all the wrong things. Renounce personal ill-feelings, anger, bitterness, etc. Seek God's grace to cleanse your heart and to help you maintain a pure heart as you prepare to discuss with your spouse about any unresolved issues that have been hurting your relationship. Ask Him to heal the hurt and pain, and His peace for any confusion.

You can pray as the psalmist prayed.

Psalm 139:23,24 (GNT)

**²³ Examine me, O God, and know my mind;
test me, and discover my thoughts.**

**²⁴ Find out if there is any evil in me
and guide me in the everlasting way.**

Psalm 51:10 (GNT)

**Create a pure heart in me, O God,
and put a new and loyal spirit in me.**

2) Receive God's empowering to love and forgive

The Holy Spirit empowers us to love with the God-kind of love by filling our hearts with the love of God. Every believer has access to this and can walk in the God-kind of love.

Romans 5:5 (GNT)

This hope does not disappoint us, for God has poured out his love into our hearts by means of the Holy Spirit, who is God's gift to us.

Galatians 5:22 (GNT)

But the Spirit produces love,...

When you walk in the God-kind of love, you are moving in union with God. This is powerful because you can now overcome and have victory over the worst situation.

1 John 4:16 (GNT)

And we ourselves know and believe the love which God has for us.

God is love, and those who live in love live in union with God and God lives in union with them.

This love in our hearts enables us to be patient, kind, put aside jealousy, pride, selfishness, erase wrongs, and press ahead.

1 Corinthians 13:4-8 (GNT)

- ⁴**Love is patient and kind; it is not jealous or conceited or proud;**
- ⁵**love is not ill-mannered or selfish or irritable; love does not keep a record of wrongs;**
- ⁶**love is not happy with evil, but is happy with the truth.**
- ⁷**Love never gives up; and its faith, hope, and patience never fail.**
- ⁸**Love is eternal.**

In prayer, before God, acknowledge the empowering work of the Holy Spirit in your life to help you walk in the love of God. Thank God that no matter how difficult or painful the situation may seem, because of His love in your heart, you will be patient and kind. Pray and thank the Holy Spirit that He empowers you to walk in 1 Corinthians 13:4-8 as you relate to your spouse. His love does not keep a record of wrongs and hence, you too will forgive and let go of the wrong and hurtful things that may have been said or done.

3) Receive God's wisdom to address the situation

It takes wisdom to know how to resolve a conflict that has escalated into a heated and volatile situation. It takes wisdom to honestly look at the root causes and address the root issues that have given rise to the problem. Look to the Lord for wisdom. *"It is the LORD who gives wisdom; from him come knowledge and understanding"* (Proverbs 2:6, GNT).

Ask God to give you the wisdom and understanding you need to resolve the issue(s). Ask in faith expecting to be able to find the right solution. *"But if any of you lack wisdom, you should pray to God, who will give it to you; because God gives generously and graciously to all"* (James 1:5, GNT). The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of wisdom and He will impart to your spirit the idea, the solution, or the right way to address the matter. Listen to Him.

Remember that God's Word is God's wisdom given to us. *"The explanation of your teachings gives light and brings wisdom to the ignorant"* (Psalm 119:130, GNT). His Word is instruction for right living (2 Timothy 3:16). So, in addition to praying and listening to the Holy Spirit, look to the instruction of the Scriptures on how to address the situation.

There is the wisdom of this world that is motivated through jealousy, bitterness, and selfishness. This kind of wisdom is actually demonic and opens the door to more disorder and all kinds of demonic work. However, God's wisdom is pure, it is not motivated by jealousy, bitterness, or selfishness. The wisdom that comes from God moves in peace, gentleness, kindness, compassion, and leads you to do good things. This is how you can differentiate if you are walking in divine God-given wisdom in addressing the conflict-situation or if you are motivated by earthly wisdom.

James 3:14-18 (GNT)

- ¹⁴**But if in your heart you are jealous, bitter, and selfish, don't sin against the truth by boasting of your wisdom.**
- ¹⁵**Such wisdom does not come down from heaven; it belongs to the world, it is unspiritual and demonic.**
- ¹⁶**Where there is jealousy and selfishness, there is also disorder and every kind of evil.**
- ¹⁷**But the wisdom from above is pure first of all; it is also peaceful, gentle, and friendly; it is full of compassion and produces a harvest of good deeds; it is free from prejudice and hypocrisy.**
- ¹⁸**And goodness is the harvest that is produced from the seeds the peacemakers plant in peace.**

The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of wisdom. Pray and ask the Holy Spirit for wisdom on how to address and resolve the situation. Wait on Him patiently. Surrender your thoughts, plans, and ideas to Him, and invite Him to fill your heart and mind with His thoughts and ideas. Ask Him for help to see the root cause for the conflict. Ask Him to show you what you are doing wrong. Ask Him to show you if there are things that are troubling your spouse. Pray for your spouse.

As God shows you, be willing to receive things. For things you are doing wrong, ask the Lord to forgive you and ask for grace to correct yourself.

While we must be careful not to “blame the devil” for every problem, we must be aware that *the thief comes to steal, kill, and destroy* (John 10:10). So, ask God to show you if there are any ways through which demonic works have gained entrance and are causing confusion and strife in your marriage. Sometimes, you may individually or later, together with your spouse repent, renounce, and close any doors of entrance you have opened to demonic work in your marriage.

4) Lovingly discuss and address the matter

Proverbs 27:5,6

⁵Open rebuke is better

Than love carefully concealed.

⁶Faithful are the wounds of a friend,

But the kisses of an enemy are deceitful.

Ephesians 4:15 (GNT)

Instead, by speaking the truth in a spirit of love, we must grow up in every way to Christ, who is the head.

This may be the most challenging step, but it still needs to be done. Set a time and place where you and your spouse sit together and discuss things concerning the specific situation that actually went out of hand. Find a quiet place and sufficient time where you do not have to rush through things. Make time to do this.

Address the one issue that needs to be discussed rather than trying to solve all problems. Take turns to talk. Let one of you speak first and share everything they thought, felt, and experienced in relation to the situation being discussed. When one is speaking, the other chooses to remain quiet and listen. When one has finished, the other then explains their side.

All this has to be done in a mature and loving way with the intent of understanding each other and coming to a peaceful solution. Avoid judging, criticizing, blaming, attacking, or retaliating. Avoid digressing into other issues or bringing in unrelated matters. The purpose of the conversation is honest discussion to explain, to understand, and be understood, and to arrive at a peaceful resolution. So stay focused on working toward this.

Practical steps to problem solving / reaching a solution

[Adapted from **Colorado State University Extension**, “**Dealing With Couples’ Anger - 10.238 - Extension.**”]

- i) Take the time to identify a specific issue you want to resolve. If you are anxious about discussing it with your spouse, ask yourself what the best and worst outcomes of a discussion are, and if you are willing to accept either outcome. “The specific issue I want to resolve is”
- ii) Decide if the issue is worth discussing. How big is the issue and what are your intentions? (To blame, resolve, place guilt, or understand?)
- iii) As a couple, decide when the two of you can talk. Pick a good time—not during meals with guests or right before one of you leaves for work. How much time will you need?
- iv) Get focused before talking. Take time to understand your feelings, thoughts, impressions, wants, and past actions related to this specific issue before you discuss it.
- v) Start the discussion with what you think is positively occurring with the issue. “Three positive things we did in the past related to this issue were: 1), 2), and 3)
- vi) When discussing the problems with the issue, state how you feel or think about the issue first. “I feel angry and sad when I see” Or “I think you don’t love me when
- vii) Be specific when giving examples of the issue. Saying, “I want to talk to you about last Thursday when we yelled at each other” will help your spouse understand you more clearly than saying, “We always get into arguments!”
- viii) Ask for what you want for yourself, your spouse, and the relationship relevant to the issue at hand. Say, “Could you please listen to my viewpoint and I will listen to your viewpoint so that we can find a solution?”
- ix) Discuss and arrive at a solution that the two of you agree on.
 - Identify the specific problem and who is involved.
 - Answer the question, “What do each of us really want or need?”
 - Brainstorm as many alternatives as possible without evaluating any of them.
 - Evaluate the alternatives by talking about and / or listing the pros and cons.
 - Select the best alternative(s) for the two of you based on what each person is willing to do (make I-statements, listen well to each other).
 - Decide who will do what, when, and how in the plan.

- x) Implement the action agreed upon.
- xi) Review your progress after an agreed upon amount of time (for example, one month). Compliment positive actions taken. Renegotiate differences.

Since, having a discussion like this may not be easy, it may be necessary to have a counselor or an intermediary involved initially to help you through this process. There is nothing wrong in asking for help, and so we encourage you to do this.

5) *Resolve the matter in peace*

We must keep in mind that our relationships with people also affect our relationship with God. Broken relationships with people to some extent hinder our personal experience of God. Hence, walking in love, forgiveness, and peace with people is important even to our relationship with God (1 John 2:9-11).

Matthew 5:9

**Blessed are the peacemakers,
For they shall be called sons of God.**

Romans 14:17-19

¹⁷for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

¹⁸For he who serves Christ in these things is acceptable to God and approved by men.

¹⁹Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another.

Be a peacemaker and a peacekeeper in your marriage. Work toward peace and unity and do the things that will bring peace and strengthen your marriage. This may mean you humble yourself, accept your faults, make changes to the way you are doing things rather than insisting you are right.

Isaiah 32:17

**The work of righteousness will be peace,
And the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance forever.**

Doing what is right will bring peace, quietness, and confidence.

Romans 12:17,18 (GNT)

¹⁷If someone has done you wrong, do not repay him with a wrong. Try to do what everyone considers to be good.

¹⁸Do everything possible on your part to live in peace with everybody.

1 Peter 3:11 (GNT)

**You must turn away from evil and do good;
you must strive for peace with all your heart.**

Even if you feel you have been wronged, with the power of God's love, let it go. Do not hold an account of every wrong you have endured and expect to be repaid in some way. Do everything you need to do to live in peace.

James 3:18

And goodness is the harvest that is produced from the seeds the peacemakers plant in peace.

As you sow seeds that bring about peace, you will reap the harvest of goodness, the blessings of joy, understanding, life, and love. So, sow peace. Keep sowing peace.

6) Give and receive forgiveness

A very important part of resolving matters peacefully is to give and receive forgiveness.

Colossians 3:12-14 (GNT)

¹² You are the people of God; he loved you and chose you for his own. So then, you must clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience.

¹³ Be tolerant with one another and forgive one another whenever any of you has a complaint against someone else. You must forgive one another just as the Lord has forgiven you.

¹⁴ And to all these qualities add love, which binds all things together in perfect unity.

Just as we have received forgiveness from the Lord, we are to extend this forgiveness to one another.

Accept what you have done wrong. Acknowledge your wrongdoing. Apologize for the wrong you did. Recognize that your wrongdoing has caused hurt and pain to your spouse. Ask for forgiveness. Be clear, be specific, be sincere. “I was wrong. I should not have said or done the things I did I am sorry that what I said and did hurt you and made you feel I am willing to change and make sure I do not say or do these things again. Could you please forgive me?”

Similarly, as your spouse recognizes his or her wrongdoing and asks you to forgive, do so willingly. All of this must be done in sincerity and not just as a pretense.

Colossians 3:18,19

¹⁸ Wives, submit yourselves to your husbands, for that is what you should do as Christians.

¹⁹ Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them.

Once you have forgiven, you must not hold any grudge, bitterness, anger, or ill-feeling toward your spouse. To forgive is to release the person and to release all negative emotions that you hold toward that person from your own heart.

Proverbs 17:9

**He who covers a transgression seeks love,
But he who repeats a matter separates friends.**

As part of extending forgiveness, you make a choice not to repeat the wrong that was said or done by your spouse toward you. You choose to let go of the past.

7) Release blessing

Romans 12:17-21 (GNT)

¹⁷ If someone has done you wrong, do not repay him with a wrong. Try to do what everyone considers to be good.

¹⁸ Do everything possible on your part to live in peace with everybody.

¹⁹ Never take revenge, my friends, but instead let God's anger do it. For the scripture says, “I will take revenge, I will pay back, says the Lord.”

²⁰ Instead, as the scripture says: “If your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them a drink; for by doing this you will make them burn with shame.”

²¹ Do not let evil defeat you; instead, conquer evil with good.

1 Peter 3:8-12 (GNT)

⁸To conclude: you must all have the same attitude and the same feelings; love one another, and be kind and humble with one another.

⁹Do not pay back evil with evil or cursing with cursing; instead, pay back with a blessing, because a blessing is what God promised to give you when he called you.

¹⁰As the scripture says,

**“If you want to enjoy life
and wish to see good times,
you must keep from speaking evil
and stop telling lies.**

**¹¹You must turn away from evil and do good;
you must strive for peace with all your heart.**

**¹²For the Lord watches over the righteous
and listens to their prayers;
but he opposes those who do evil.”**

As you work through this process of resolving conflict, you also make a choice to release the past and choose to release blessing over your spouse. Give up every thought of retaliation. Conquer wrong by doing what is good. Release blessing because that is what God has done for us.

Think thoughts of blessing. When any negative thought or remembrance of unfair or hurtful things said or done by your spouse come back to your mind, choose to cast down those thoughts. Remind yourself that you have made a choice to walk in the love of God. Remind yourself that you are pursuing peace. Remind yourself that you have released forgiveness. Therefore, you will not entertain any thought that goes against the instruction of God’s Word. Pray and ask God to help you guard your mind.

Speak blessing. Watch your words. Refuse to speak words that repeat the wrong that may have been done in the past. Do not hold the past against your spouse.

Do what will bless your spouse. Do things that are kind, helpful, encouraging, loving and supportive.

Keep strife out of your life**Proverbs 21:9**

**Better to dwell in a corner of a housetop,
Than in a house shared with a contentious woman.**

Where there is contention, anger, and quarreling, the home becomes more of a war zone instead of a resting place. It becomes very difficult for husband and wife and children. Strife opens the door to all kinds of evil. So live life without strife. Follow the instruction of God’s Word and always keep strife out of your life.

APPLICATION

In the light of what we have covered in this chapter, reflect on the following:

Write your answers below and share these with your spouse (fiancé).

Note: *Resolve ahead of time that you will not argue!*

Try to be open, kind and understanding as you address sensitive areas.

- 1) What did you remember learning from your parents / family about handling conflict—good and bad? How can you imbibe the good and avoid the bad?

- 2) What are (could be) some areas of conflict in your relationship?

- 3) Try to discuss those areas identified in 2) and preemptively arrive at a place of understanding and agreement on a resolution. If these are areas where conflict has been happening, try to work through the **seven steps to resolving conflicts**. Work through one area at a time.

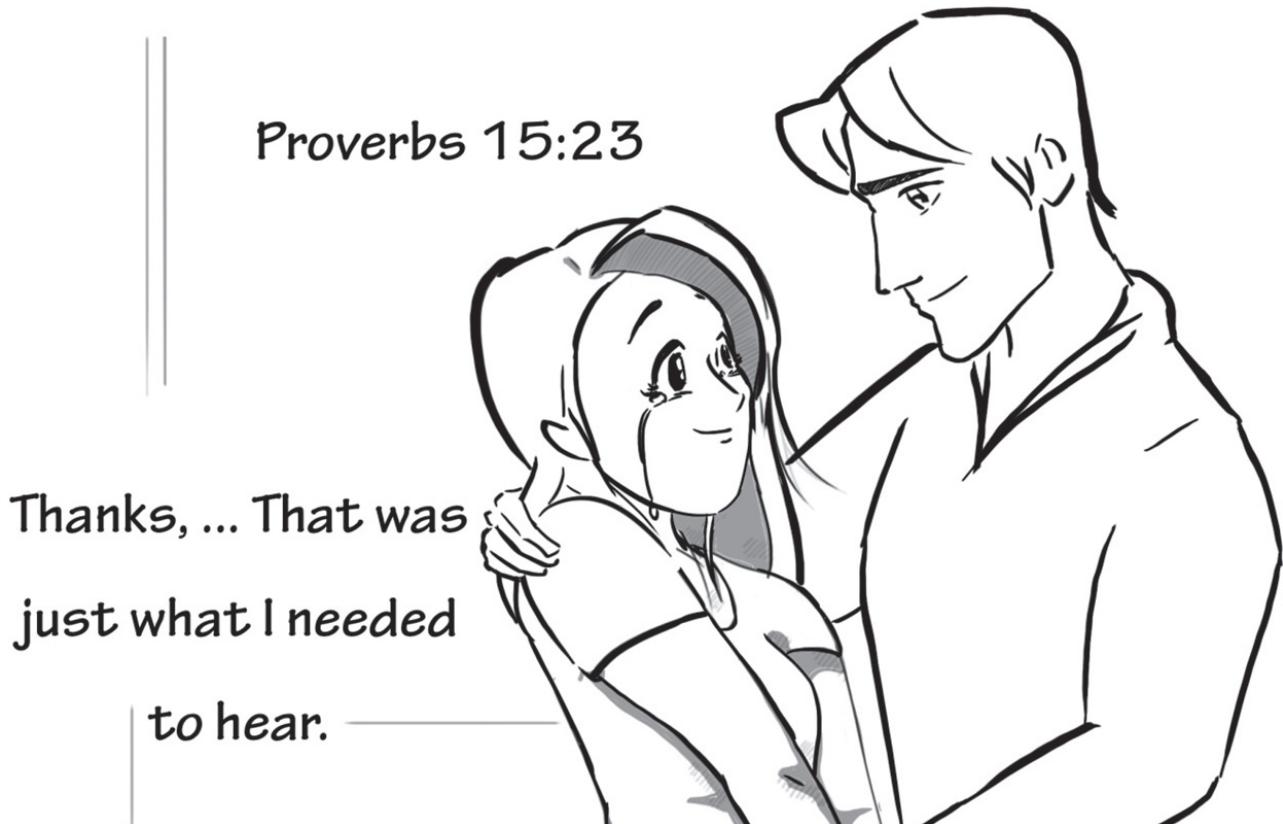
TURNING POINT

Pray over the following for your own life.

- 1) Pray for God's wisdom and understanding for both of you to maintain a good, peaceful, and healthy marriage relationship.
- 2) Pray, speak, and release God's forgiveness to your spouse for any hurtful thing that may have happened in the past. Release it and determine never to speak about this in a hurtful manner.

ACTION ITEM

Read the FREE APC book "*Living Life Without Strife*." You can download a PDF version from apcwo.org/books.



11

OVERCOMING LIFE'S CHALLENGES

Challenges come to everybody

John 16:33 (AMPC)

I have told you these things, so that in Me you may have [perfect] peace *and* confidence. In the world you have tribulation *and* trials *and* distress *and* frustration; but be of good cheer [take courage; be confident, certain, undaunted]! For I have overcome the world. [I have deprived it of power to harm you and have conquered it for you.]

The Lord Jesus clearly warned us that in the world there will be challenges. The good news is that in Him, we can walk in peace and confidence, and because of Him, we can overcome whatever comes our way.

1 Corinthians 10:13 (The Message)

No test or temptation that comes your way is beyond the course of what others have had to face. All you need to remember is that God will never let you down; he'll never let you be pushed past your limit; he'll always be there to help you come through it.

Life's tests, challenges, and temptations come to everyone. Others have also had to face similar things.

temptation (Greek) = a putting to proof (by experiment [of good], experience [of evil], solicitation, discipline, or provocation)

- Challenges can either make you or break you. They can either paralyze you and pin you down or serve to perfect you and propel you into the plans and purposes of God. How you react to the challenges you face will determine the outcome.
- Challenges make life interesting. Overcoming them makes life meaningful.
- Challenges help us discover things about ourselves that we really never knew.
- Challenges help us grow. They stretch us beyond what we are accustomed to.
- Great people are simply ordinary folk who have faced adversity and triumphed.
- Without accepting a challenge and determining to conquer it, you will never experience the thrill of victory.
- Determine to face life's challenges and use every challenge to move forward in the plans and purposes of God.

- We will experience challenges in our marriages. Our marriage vows are a commitment that we make to stay with our spouse through all of life's challenges.

The minister addresses the groom: (Groom), *do you take (bride) to be your wife? Will you love her, comfort her, honor, and protect her, and forsaking all others, be faithful to her as long as you both shall live?*

The groom says: *I do.*

As the groom places the ring on the bride's finger, he says: *With this ring, I, (groom), take you (bride) to be my wife, to have and to hold from this day forward; for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness, and in health, to love and to cherish till death do us part, according to God's holy Word. I give you this ring as a sign of constant faith and abiding love. With my body, I honor you, all that I am I give to you; this is my solemn vow.*

Life's challenges in marriage

Let us consider some of life's challenges that could come against any marriage.

For better, for worse

The reality of this is not easy to walk through. There are times when certain decisions are made that can lead us into situations that are worse off than where we started. We need to keep our faith strong, our spirits full of joy as we go through the “night seasons” of life.

For richer, for poorer

Perhaps one of you came from a wealthy family. But when you got married, you had to start from very simple and basic beginnings. You could not afford the luxuries that you enjoyed while living with your parents. Or sometimes, as you journey through life, financial situations may change, and you may go through seasons when finances are tight. During this time, we need to stick together and extend our faith for divine provision, blessing, and increase.

In sickness and in health

We cannot predict the challenges we may face that affect our health. We need to stand by and care for each other. We need to extend our faith and believe God for healing and recovery. We must not lose the will to live in the wholeness promised for us.

Proverbs 18:14 (GNT)

Your will to live can sustain you when you are sick, but if you lose it, your last hope is gone.

Proverbs 18:14 (The Message)

A healthy spirit conquers adversity, but what can you do when the spirit is crushed?

Unmet expectations

There is also the challenge of delayed or unmet expectations in marriage. You may have planned that life would take a certain course once you are married. But things change drastically and what you had

hoped for seems to have been taken away or delayed indefinitely. This can leave you disappointed, dissatisfied, and sometimes, even clueless on what to do in life. But we must remember that nothing is a “surprise” to God. We must still believe that He will work all things out for our good.

Proverbs 13:12 (GNT)

When hope is crushed, the heart is crushed, but a wish come true fills you with joy.

When things just don't seem to be working

Maybe in the days prior to the wedding, the two of you were really “best” of friends. Everything seemed so full of promise and an exciting life seemed to await you as you entered marriage. However, once both of you did get married, small differences became big issues that seemed to keep recurring in a vicious cycle. You just could not get along no matter how many times you tried to talk things through. You are now convinced that things are just not working out and you are at the end of the road. This is surely a challenging place to be. But many others have been there and have seen things turn around. So, don’t give up! Reach up to God and reach out to get the help you need.

Domestic violence and abuse

In some situations, there could be violence and emotional or physical abuse. Either one or both husband and wife turn aggressive and become abusive and violent. No one really gets into a marriage expecting something like this and yet, for various reasons, find themselves in such a situation. This is definitely an unhealthy situation and needs immediate external help.

Irresponsibility and neglect

What if your spouse just neglects the family, their role, and responsibility toward the marriage and home, and decides to live their own life, or just not do what is required of them? Suddenly, the entire weight of the marriage, the home, the family seems to be all on you—just one person.

Unfaithfulness

Perhaps the worst situation of all is when your spouse is unfaithful, gets into an affair and falls into adultery. This can be devastating and can affect many people.

There are many other kinds of challenges that could come our way.

How do you overcome life’s challenges that come against your marriage and family as a believer?

You are an overcomer

As we saw earlier from what the Lord Jesus announced in John 16:33, He has overcome the world. He did this for us so that we can overcome whatever comes our way.

1 John 5:1,4 (The Message)

¹Every person who believes that Jesus is, in fact, the Messiah, is God-begotten. If we love the One who conceives the child, we’ll surely love the child who was conceived.

⁴Every God-begotten person conquers the world’s ways. The conquering power that brings the world to its knees is our faith.

As a believer in Jesus, you are born of God. You are a child of God. And every child of God conquers the world—everything that the world throws against us. You are an overcomer, a conqueror.

2 Corinthians 2:14

Now thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place.

God always leads us in triumph. Believe God's Word. Believe that in every situation, God will bring you through triumphant.

While going through life's challenges is not easy, believe what God's Word has declared about you, that you are an overcomer and that He will lead you out in triumph. Things may look bleak, impossible, without any hope whatsoever but keep your eyes on God's Word.

Do not let your past, or your present, dictate your future

To overcome a challenge is not necessarily to reverse the situation. Rather it is to triumph over the devastation that could have potentially taken place and still fulfill your God-given destiny.

There will be some situations that cannot be reversed. The death of a spouse, the unfaithfulness committed, etc. cannot be reversed. You will have to face these and gain the strength to rise up and press forward.

Then there are some situations that are temporary. For example, if you get laid off your job, you may go through a season of financial difficulty. But then you believe God to provide you a better job, and this happens, and you move on to experience His provision and abundance. It is not that you did not go through a season of financial difficulty, but you went through and came out much better, blessed, and prosperous.

While some situations and challenges may be more painful than others, the important thing is not to permit what has happened in the past or what you may be presently going through to control you and dictate your future.

You should not become a prisoner of your past. With God's help, you can arise, overcome whatever may have happened, and move into a future that is blessed.

To overcome life's challenges

Here are four practical things that we can do to overcome life's challenges.

1) Guard your heart

Proverbs 4:23

**Keep your heart with all diligence,
For out of it spring the issues of life.**

Proverbs 4:23 (The Message)

Keep vigilant watch over your heart; that's where life starts.

Guard your heart. Don't let negative feelings grip your heart. Don't let fear get a hold of you. Don't let anger, hate, bitterness, unforgiveness, despair, or hopelessness get a hold of you.

Guard your heart from negative feelings toward God. Sometimes, people get angry with God. They turn their backs against God, give up on His promises, and wander away. Don't do this!

How do we guard our hearts?

- By keeping God's Word in our hearts and keeping our eyes on His Word.
- In prayer, we recognize and release any negative heart attitude and ask God to fill us with what comes of His Holy Spirit.

Your attitude in difficult situations matters. Your attitude is your choice.

Focus on remedies, not faults. Remember that God can and will turn things around.

During migration, both the hummingbird and the vulture fly over desert regions. All vultures see is rotting meat because that is what they look for. They thrive on that diet. But hummingbirds ignore the smelly flesh of dead animals. Instead, they look for the colorful blossoms of desert plants. The vultures live on what was. They live on the past. They fill themselves with what is dead and gone. But hummingbirds live on what is. They seek new life. They fill themselves with freshness and life. Each bird finds what it is looking for. We all do. [Adapted from *Reader's Digest*, May 1990, Steve Goodier.]

2) Overcome evil with good

We have stated this earlier, and we reiterate this here because this is especially important.

Romans 12:19-21 (GNT)

¹⁹Never take revenge, my friends, but instead let God's anger do it. For the scripture says, "I will take revenge, I will pay back, says the Lord."

²⁰Instead, as the scripture says: "If your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them a drink; for by doing this you will make them burn with shame."

²¹Do not let evil defeat you; instead, conquer evil with good.

It is quite natural to want to take matters in your own hand and retaliate when you feel you have been treated unfairly or have been wronged. However, choose to step away from doing such things and instead, let God decide on what needs to be done for the injustice or wrong you may have faced. Instead, God directs us to overcome evil with good.

Choose to do these.

- You overcome unrighteousness with righteousness.
- You choose to extend forgiveness even when you have been offended.
- You choose to yield even when you don't have to.
- You choose to love even when you have been hurt.

3) Keep exercising your faith

One of the important things we see in the ministry of Jesus is that He always encouraged people to have faith. When the storms and winds blew upon the boat in which Jesus and His disciples were, Jesus rebuked the wind and waves, and calmed the storm. He then turned around to His disciples and asked, “*Where is your faith?*” (Luke 8:22-25). When Jairus’ daughter died while Jesus was still on the way to his house, Jesus immediately told Jairus, “*Don’t be afraid, only believe*” (Mark 5:36, GNT). Although Lazarus had been dead for four days, Jesus told Martha, “*Didn’t I tell you that you would see God’s glory if you believed?*” (John 11:40, GNT).

God is in control. Absolutely! He has never lost control! But God who is in control has instructed us to have faith in Him! Regardless of how difficult the situation, we are to have faith in Him that He will work things out in a manner that will bless the days that are ahead. We are called to follow the example of Abraham. “*When everything was hopeless, Abraham believed anyway, deciding to live not on the basis of what he saw he couldn’t do but on what God said he would do. And so he was made father of a multitude of peoples*” (Romans 4:18, The Message).

- In the midst of life’s challenges, be courageous.
- Be courageous, and in faith, call victory in the face of apparent defeat.
- Be courageous, and in faith, call life in the midst of death.
- Be courageous, and in faith, call abundance in the midst of poverty.
- Be courageous, and in faith, call success in the midst of failure.
- Do not allow doubt, fear, or impatience to nullify your faith!

Faith ushers you into a place of rest—a state of calm assurance, confidence, and resting in God (Hebrews 4:3,9,10). God invites us to “*Come back and quietly trust in me. Then you will be strong and secure*” (Isaiah 30:15, GNT). It is in this place of quietly resting and trusting in Him that we will be strong and secure. “*Faith that is firm is also patient*” (Isaiah 28:16, GNT).

4) Take small, but positive steps

How God leads you through and out of each situation will vary. But it is important to take steps of faith to walk through the valley or pass through the night season.

Get the help of God’s people. If you need a spiritual mentor, counselor, or pastor to help you through the challenging season, don’t hesitate to get help. God uses His people to come alongside us and journey with us through different seasons of life because we need each other. For instance, if you are making your way out of a difficult financial situation, don’t be hesitant to get the help of a good finance professional who can help you manage your finances so that you can get out of debt. If you are going through a grieving period of the loss of your spouse, it is good to take time to pray and be encouraged by a few close friends in the faith. In case you are going through a difficult time in your marriage, a period of separation or divorce, it would be helpful to meet regularly with a Christian counselor or pastor who can support and guide you through this season.

Psalm 40:1-3

¹I waited patiently for the LORD;

And He inclined to me,

And heard my cry.

²He also brought me up out of a horrible pit,

Out of the miry clay,

And set my feet upon a rock,

And established my steps.

³He has put a new song in my mouth—

Praise to our God;

Many will see it and fear,

And will trust in the LORD.

Very often, God's way to bring us out of the horrible pit is to have us take incremental steps out of it with His help. We journey patiently with Him and He will bring us out. We know that He will set us on solid ground, establish us, and give us a new song to sing that will glorify Him.

Walk with wisdom. Think long term. Think about the fulfilling of God's purposes through your life in spite of the challenges. No man, no devil can stop God's plans for you. "*I'm convinced: You can do anything and everything. Nothing and no one can upset your plans*" (Job 42:2, The Message).

Biblical instructions

We now share some biblical instructions on five other areas of life's challenges.

1) Unsaved spouse

It is possible that you could be the only believer in your family and your spouse is still not a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. Often things can be difficult because of this difference in faith. You may find it difficult to have time for personal devotion, take time to worship at a local church, or give financially into God's Kingdom. There may be challenges in the way you would want to bring up your children, and several other differences leading to conflict.

Here is what the Scriptures teach us in such situations.

1 Corinthians 7:12-16 (GNT)

¹²To the others I say (I, myself, not the Lord): if a Christian man has a wife who is an unbeliever and she agrees to go on living with him, he must not divorce her.

¹³And if a Christian woman is married to a man who is an unbeliever and he agrees to go on living with her, she must not divorce him.

¹⁴For the unbelieving husband is made acceptable to God by being united to his wife, and the unbelieving wife is made acceptable to God by being united to her Christian husband. If this were not so, their children would be like pagan children; but as it is, they are acceptable to God.

¹⁵However, if the one who is not a believer wishes to leave the Christian partner, let it be so. In such cases the Christian partner, whether husband or wife, is free to act. God has called you to live in peace.

¹⁶How can you be sure, Christian wife, that you will not save your husband? Or how can you be sure, Christian husband, that you will not save your wife?

1 Peter 3:1,2 (GNT)

¹In the same way you wives must submit yourselves to your husbands, so that if any of them do not believe God's word, your conduct will win them over to believe. It will not be necessary for you to say a word,
²because they will see how pure and reverent your conduct is.

The key instructions we elicit from these two passages...

- Avoid divorce or separation and live peacefully together. The believing wife is to walk in respect and submission to her non-believing husband. This of course, should be "in the Lord," that is, as long as there is no violation of faith. Trust that the Lord will touch the non-believing husband.
- God will bless your spouse and your children because of your faith in Him.
- However, if the spouse willfully abandons and leaves because of this difference in faith, then let him / her depart in peace. The believing spouse is free to dissolve the marriage and move on.

2) Divorce and remarriage

What are the instructions that God has given us concerning divorce and remarriage?

Malachi 2:14-16 (GNT)

¹⁴You ask why he no longer accepts them. It is because he knows you have broken your promise to the wife you married when you were young. She was your partner, and you have broken your promise to her, although you promised before God that you would be faithful to her.

¹⁵Didn't God make you one body and spirit with her? What was his purpose in this? It was that you should have children who are truly God's people. So make sure that none of you breaks his promise to his wife.

¹⁶"I hate divorce," says the Lord God of Israel. "I hate it when one of you does such a cruel thing to his wife. Make sure that you do not break your promise to be faithful to your wife."

Matthew 5:31,32 (GNT)

³¹"It was also said, 'Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a written notice of divorce.'

³²But now I tell you: if a man divorces his wife for any cause other than her unfaithfulness, then he is guilty of making her commit adultery if she marries again; and the man who marries her commits adultery also.

Matthew 19:3-9 (GNT)

³Some Pharisees came to him and tried to trap him by asking, "Does our Law allow a man to divorce his wife for whatever reason he wishes?"

⁴Jesus answered, "Haven't you read the scripture that says that in the beginning the Creator made people male and female?

⁵And God said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and unite with his wife, and the two will become one.'

⁶So they are no longer two, but one. No human being must separate, then, what God has joined together."

⁷The Pharisees asked him, "Why, then, did Moses give the law for a man to hand his wife a divorce notice and send her away?"

⁸Jesus answered, "Moses gave you permission to divorce your wives because you are so hard to teach. But it was not like that at the time of creation.

⁹I tell you, then, that any man who divorces his wife for any cause other than her unfaithfulness, commits adultery if he marries some other woman."

1 Corinthians 7:10,11 (GNT)

10 For married people I have a command which is not my own but the Lord's: a wife must not leave her husband;
11 but if she does, she must remain single or else be reconciled to her husband; and a husband must not divorce his wife.

1 Corinthians 7:15 (GNT)

However, if the one who is not a believer wishes to leave the Christian partner, let it be so. In such cases the Christian partner, whether husband or wife, is free to act. God has called you to live in peace.

The Scripture makes it clear that God does not approve of divorce. So, we must operate from this understanding and instruction.

During marital conflict and distress, refuse to think about divorce as an option. If needed, you may temporarily separate for a short period of time to work through problems and difficult situations. But do not consider divorce as a solution to your marital problems. Get the help you need from a pastor or counselor and work through the problems.

There are only two valid reasons for divorce—adultery or abandonment. However, even in such situations, we encourage first that every attempt be made to work toward healing and restoration. Only after a sincere effort has been made, then either of the couple is free to exercise their choice. There may be other situations such as abuse (physical or emotional), destructive behaviors, willful neglect of the family (another form of abandonment) that could eventually lead to a separation or divorce. In some situations, even though one partner is desiring to work on the marriage, the other partner of their own, will opt for a divorce, which we know is not God's best, and yet they choose to make that decision.

As believers, we must understand that when a brother or sister is going through a divorce, it is an extremely painful process. We need to be gracious, gentle, and supportive through this. We believe and pray for God's mercy and redemptive work in their lives. Should the Lord in due course of time lead them to remarriage, we should bless them in this. [Note: We do not support the indiscriminate, random divorce-remarriage-divorce-remarriage that happens in some cultures where marriage and God's instruction concerning marriage are not honored. We support remarriage within the context of biblical instruction and knowing the heart and mind of God as revealed to us in Scripture.]

3) Death of a spouse**Psalm 68:5**

A father of the fatherless, a defender of widows, Is God in His holy habitation.

Psalm 146:9

The LORD watches over the strangers; He relieves the fatherless and widow; But the way of the wicked He turns upside down.

Proverbs 15:25

The LORD will destroy the house of the proud, But He will establish the boundary of the widow.

Losing a spouse is a painful thing. We look to the Lord to comfort, strengthen, and encourage us. With God's help, we need to get back on our feet, complete the rest of the journey, and finish the work He has assigned to us.

God's Word promises that God will defend the widow and work on their behalf.

Extended family members and the local church family are provided instructions on how to take care of their widows in 1 Timothy 5.

1 Timothy 5:3-16 (The Message)

³Take care of widows who are destitute.

⁴If a widow has family members to take care of her, let them learn that religion begins at their own doorstep and that they should pay back with gratitude some of what they have received. This pleases God immensely.

⁵You can tell a legitimate widow by the way she has put all her hope in God, praying to him constantly for the needs of others as well as her own.

⁶But a widow who exploits people's emotions and pocketbooks - well, there's nothing to her.

⁷Tell these things to the people so that they will do the right thing in their extended family.

⁸Anyone who neglects to care for family members in need repudiates the faith. That's worse than refusing to believe in the first place.

⁹Sign some widows up for the special ministry of offering assistance. They will in turn receive support from the church. They must be over sixty, married only once,

¹⁰and have a reputation for helping out with children, strangers, tired Christians, the hurt and troubled.

¹¹Don't put young widows on this list. No sooner will they get on than they'll want to get off, obsessed with wanting to get a husband rather than serving Christ in this way.

¹²By breaking their word, they're liable to go from bad to worse,

¹³frittering away their days on empty talk, gossip, and trivialities.

¹⁴No, I'd rather the young widows go ahead and get married in the first place, have children, manage their homes, and not give critics any foothold for finding fault.

¹⁵Some of them have already left and gone after Satan.

¹⁶Any Christian woman who has widows in her family is responsible for them. They shouldn't be dumped on the church. The church has its hands full already with widows who need help.

4) Death and remarriage

Romans 7:2,3 (The Message)

²For instance, a wife is legally tied to her husband while he lives, but if he dies, she's free.

³If she lives with another man while her husband is living, she's obviously an adulteress. But if he dies, she is quite free to marry another man in good conscience, with no one's disapproval.

1 Corinthians 7:8,9 (GNT)

⁸Now, to the unmarried and to the widows I say that it would be better for you to continue to live alone as I do.

⁹But if you cannot restrain your desires, go ahead and marry—it is better to marry than to burn with passion.

1 Corinthians 7:39 (The Message)

A wife must stay with her husband as long as he lives. If he dies, she is free to marry anyone she chooses. She will, of course, want to marry a believer and have the blessing of the Master.

The Bible states that a widower is free to remarry should they choose to. As a local church family, we need to come alongside, support, and bless their lives.

Proper preparation should be made in cases where remarriage happens, and children from two families are brought together into one blended family. Husband and wife should agree to treat all children equally and fairly. Children should feel loved and accepted by both parents.

APPLICATION

In the light of what we have covered in this chapter, reflect on the following:

Prayerfully assess any challenges you may be facing in your life. For each area of challenge, determine what are the root causes (personal mistakes, things beyond your control, demonic attacks, etc.). For each challenge, identify from Scripture God's promises relevant to that area of challenge. Also, determine what practical things you can do to overcome each area of challenge and come out victorious with God's help. If possible, write these down.

TURNING POINT

Pray over the following for your own life.

Pray over each area of challenge you are facing claiming God's promise and inviting God to fulfill His Word in your life. Then declare God's Word over those challenges. Command mountains to be moved. Command situations to align themselves to what the Word of God declares.

ACTION ITEM

Read through the following FREE APC books.

- *Don't Lose Hope*
- *The Night Seasons of Life*
- *The Redemptive Heart of God*

You can download FREE PDF versions from apcwo.org/books.

12

PRESSING FORWARD BY RELEASING THE PAST

As we journey through life, we realize that several situations could arise that not only cause conflict within a marriage relationship but can cause hurt and leave someone wounded and scarred. This could happen especially if a spouse has been abusive, violent, negligent, or unfaithful. In this chapter, we provide a short word of encouragement challenging the ones who have been wounded to release the past and press forward with God's empowering grace.

Hurts, wounds, and scars from your best friend

Psalm 41:9 (GNT)

**Even my best friend, the one I trusted most,
the one who shared my food,
has turned against me.**

Hurt and pain that come from your own spouse through criticism, angry words, and other actions can be very painful. This could leave a person emotionally wounded, scarred, and crippled. However, we must not permit the pain of the past to rob us of the promise that the future holds for us.

We must learn to release the past, receive healing for our wounds, strengthen ourselves in the Lord, and press forward into the future.

The Restorer of our souls

Psalm 23:3

He restores my soul;...

Psalm 30:11,12

**¹¹ You have turned for me my mourning into dancing;
You have put off my sackcloth and clothed me with gladness,
¹² To the end that my glory may sing praise to You and not be silent.
O LORD my God, I will give thanks to You forever.**

Isaiah 61:1-3

**¹“The Spirit of the LORD God is upon Me,
Because the LORD has anointed Me
To preach good tidings to the poor;
He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted,
To proclaim liberty to the captives,
And the opening of the prison to those who are bound;
² To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD,
And the day of vengeance of our God;
To comfort all who mourn,**

³To console those who mourn in Zion,
To give them beauty for ashes,
The oil of joy for mourning,
The garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness;
That they may be called trees of righteousness,
The planting of the LORD, that He may be glorified.”

God is the Restorer of our souls including our emotions. He is the One who turns things around, even emotionally. He heals the brokenhearted. He consoles us. He replaces the ashes with beauty. He brings in joy in place of mourning, and praise in place of heaviness.

The power of forgiveness

Proverbs 30:21-23 (GNT)

²¹There are four things that the earth itself cannot tolerate:

²²a slave who becomes a king,
a fool who has all he wants to eat,
²³a hateful woman who gets married,
and a servant woman who takes the place of her mistress.

1 John 2:9-11

⁹He who says he is in the light, and hates his brother, is in darkness until now.

¹⁰He who loves his brother abides in the light, and there is no cause for stumbling in him.

¹¹But he who hates his brother is in darkness and walks in darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes.

While we do not have control on offenses that come against us, we can and should keep ourselves from walking in hate. When spouses carry hate in their hearts, it leads to an intolerable situation. As believers, we cannot carry hate in our hearts toward anyone. Hate blinds us causing us to stumble, do foolish things, not knowing where we are going, or what we are doing.

Luke 17:3,4 (GNT)

³So watch what you do!

“If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him.

⁴If he sins against you seven times in one day, and each time he comes to you saying, ‘I repent,’ you must forgive him.”

The antidote to hate is to release forgiveness to the offender for the wrong that was done. Even the Lord Jesus, when He was betrayed and crucified, spoke forgiveness to His persecutors in the midst of His pain and suffering. We are called to release forgiveness.

Forgiveness is a willful commitment to let go of resentment, bitterness, and the need for vengeance. Granting forgiveness to your spouse is not waiting for the time till all your wounds can heal. Forgiveness is not harboring your anger but resolving it by releasing your anger and resentment over to God (Romans 12:17). Forgiveness is unconditional—it has to be given freely without expecting anything in return as it is a command from God to forgive (Colossians 3:13). Forgiveness is a decision and not an emotion. It must be extended even when we don’t “feel” like it! It is a choice and an act of the will. The spouse who grants forgiveness is not a sacrificial victim but a living testimony of Christ’s love. When you

grant forgiveness, you declare that the situation is dead and you release the right to cling on, dwell on, or bring up the offense later.

The power of forgetting

Philippians 3:13-15 (GNT)

¹³ Of course, my friends, I really do not think that I have already won it; the one thing I do, however, is to forget what is behind me and do my best to reach what is ahead.

¹⁴ So I run straight toward the goal in order to win the prize, which is God's call through Christ Jesus to the life above.

¹⁵ All of us who are spiritually mature should have this same attitude. But if some of you have a different attitude, God will make this clear to you.

Not only are we to forgive, but we are to forget. This again is what God Himself does with our wrongs. He removes them, as the Scriptures tell us, *as far as the east is from the west* (Psalm 103:12). He buries them in the depths of the sea (Micah 7:19). He cleanses us, forever wiping away our offenses. He remembers them no more. God now calls us to forgive as He forgives which includes forgetting what was done. Once forgotten, although we may be able to recall what happened, we no longer live in the pain of the offense.

The power of letting go

Hebrews 12:1,2 (GNT)

¹ As for us, we have this large crowd of witnesses around us. So then, let us rid ourselves of everything that gets in the way, and of the sin which holds on to us so tightly, and let us run with determination the race that lies before us.

² Let us keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, on whom our faith depends from beginning to end. He did not give up because of the cross! On the contrary, because of the joy that was waiting for him, he thought nothing of the disgrace of dying on the cross, and he is now seated at the right side of God's throne.

Hebrews 12:12-16 (GNT)

¹² Lift up your tired hands, then, and strengthen your trembling knees!

¹³ Keep walking on straight paths, so that the lame foot may not be disabled, but instead be healed.

¹⁴ Try to be at peace with everyone, and try to live a holy life, because no one will see the Lord without it.

¹⁵ Guard against turning back from the grace of God. Let no one become like a bitter plant that grows up and causes many troubles with its poison.

¹⁶ Let no one become immoral or unspiritual like Esau, who for a single meal sold his rights as the older son.

We also need to let go of the experience itself. We cannot permit the pain, hurt, anger, bitterness—the emotions associated with the traumatic experience in the past—become a weight and burden to us. We must release these to God and get them off our lives. These should not become a burden that weighs us down or something that cripples our progress.

Seeing the other as Christ sees them

We learn to see our spouse as Christ sees them. For instance, if our spouse who has hurt and wounded us has asked forgiveness and repented before God, we need to see them as God sees them. We need to acknowledge that God has indeed forgiven them and made them clean.

Declaring the positive in the face of negatives

We need to engage actively in our healing and recovering from the hurts, wounds, and scars of the past. A very important part of this process is to declare the positives based on the promises of God despite the negatives. We must acknowledge the good things that are in us, in Christ, even though at the moment, we may be emotionally in pain and hurt. We must declare the promise of blessing even though at the moment, we may seem to be at the lowest point in our lives. Declaring God's Word is a healing balm to our own souls and brings healing into our lives and begins to shape and mold our future into what God desires it to be.

He makes all things new

Job 42:10,12 (GNT)

¹⁰ Then, after Job had prayed for his three friends, the LORD made him prosperous again and gave him twice as much as he had had before.

¹² The LORD blessed the last part of Job's life even more than he had blessed the first...

Psalm 30:5,11

**⁵ His anger lasts only a moment,
his goodness for a lifetime.**

**Tears may flow in the night,
but joy comes in the morning.**

**¹¹ You have changed my sadness into a joyful dance;
you have taken away my sorrow
and surrounded me with joy.**

God can make all things new in our lives. God caused Job to prosper once again, have twice as much as before, and his latter part of life was even more blessed than the beginning. He went through the season of turmoil and pain. God brought him through and brought him out into something much better than his past. We see this in the lives of so many people in the Bible. Joseph went through his time as a slave and in prison but God brought him out to be the prime minister. David went through his time of living in caves and surviving but God brought him into being king over Israel. The night passes and morning dawns. God turns our mourning into dancing. He removes our garments of mourning and clothes us with gladness. He restores dignity, shows us our true worth, and fills us with confidence. Believe that God will do this for you too.

APPLICATION

In the light of what we have covered in this chapter, reflect on the following:

While the hurts and wounds inflicted by the one you love are most painful, we always have the choice of releasing forgiveness, forgetting, and letting go of the past and believing God for a glorious future. In his book “*The New Freedom of Forgiveness*,” David Augsburger provides five steps to forgiveness and restored relationships.

If this is relevant to what you have experienced, you can work through these.

- 1) Restoring the attitude of love:** Choose to see the person who has offended you as full of worth and precious regardless of any wrongdoing, and choose to love them again.
- 2) Releasing the painful past:** Accept the person who has offended you for who they are today and do not hold the past against them.
- 3) Reconstructing the relationship:** Accept their repentance and extend forgiveness and begin rebuilding the relationship.
- 4) Reopening the future:** While not every forgiveness will lead to a continuing conversation or the resumption of the previous relationship, you choose to step into the future free of the past. If you choose to be together, you continue to walk in love and forgiveness.
- 5) Reaffirming the relationship:** Reconciliation must end in celebration with acceptance and mutual affirmation for who each other are and expecting the best for the future.

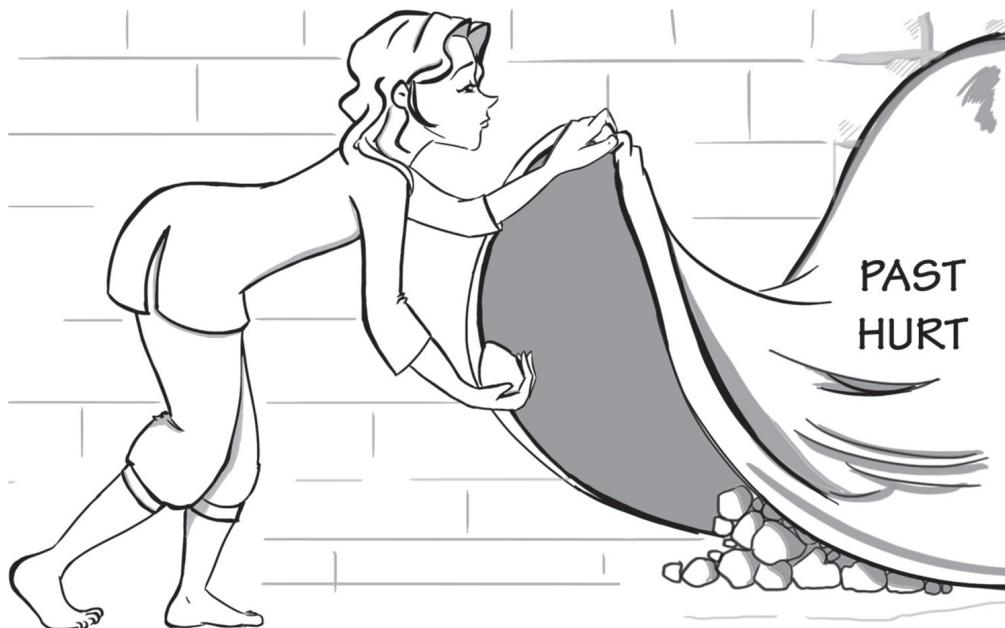
TURNING POINT

Pray over the following for your own life.

As appropriate, pray for God’s empowering grace upon your life to walk in forgiveness, to forget, to let go, to see the other person as Christ sees them, to declare the positive in the face of the negatives, and to believe God to make all things new in your life.

ACTION ITEM

If relevant, try to get a copy and read through the book “*The New Freedom of Forgiveness*” by David Augsburger.



13

BOUNDARIES

Even though a man and woman are married, it does not automatically insulate them from having emotional and sexual affections for other people of the opposite sex. A married man can still feel attracted to other women, and so also a married woman can feel attracted to other men. Romantic affections for someone outside your marriage usually begins in a casual way, with a colleague at work or with a friend who may be going through a difficult time and you with good intentions wanted to just lend a listening ear. Soon emotional affections begin to develop which leads to emotional entanglement. This, if not checked, can lead to physical affection and sexual involvement. The impact of such emotional entanglements can be devastating to the marriage.

We must understand that marriage does not come with automatic self-protection. Instead, we must guard our marriages by guarding our minds, emotions, and affections. None of us are immune to these attacks and temptations. No matter how spiritual a person might be, or how involved in Christian ministry, we are all vulnerable in this area. Hence, all of us must recognize this area of potential danger and do what is necessary to protect our marriages. This is the focus of this chapter.

Beware the seductress

Proverbs 2:16-22 (The Message)

¹⁶ Wise friends will rescue you from the Temptress - that smooth-talking Seductress

¹⁷ Who's faithless to the husband she married years ago, never gave a second thought to her promises before God.

¹⁸ Her whole way of life is doomed; every step she takes brings her closer to hell.

¹⁹ No one who joins her company ever comes back, ever sets foot on the path to real living.

²⁰ So - join the company of good men and women, keep your feet on the tried and true paths.

²¹ It's the men who walk straight who will settle this land, the women with integrity who will last here.

²² The corrupt will lose their lives; the dishonest will be gone for good.

Proverbs 11:16 (GNT)

A gracious woman is respected, but a woman without virtue is a disgrace.

Proverbs 11:22 (GNT)

Beauty in a woman without good judgment is like a gold ring in a pig's snout.

Proverbs 7:4,5 (GNT)

⁴ Treat wisdom as your sister, and insight as your closest friend.

⁵ They will keep you away from other men's wives, from women with seductive words.

Proverbs 7:21-26 (GNT)

²¹ So she tempted him with her charms, and he gave in to her smooth talk.

²² Suddenly he was going with her like an ox on the way to be slaughtered, like a deer prancing into a trap

²³ where an arrow would pierce its heart. He was like a bird going into a net—he did not know that his life was in

danger.

²⁴ Now then, sons, listen to me. Pay attention to what I say.

²⁵ Do not let such a woman win your heart; don't go wandering after her.

²⁶ She has been the ruin of many men and caused the death of too many to count.

Our observation makes us aware that extra-marital affairs, infidelity, and unfaithfulness in marriage happens all around us and is perhaps on the rise in urban centers. Men and women “flirt” so freely in the workplace. They use suggestive and sometimes explicit ways to lure each other into romantic relationships without giving regard to the institution of marriage. Men and women at all levels are lured into illicit and immoral relationships. Whether a one-night stand or an ongoing affair, many men and women are taken prey and face dire consequences.

Some men and women prowl for their next victim, going from one adulterous relationship to another. The workplace is their hunting ground. It takes wisdom and grace to stay away from the seductive lure of such people.

It's a slow fade into darkness

Proverbs 9:17,18

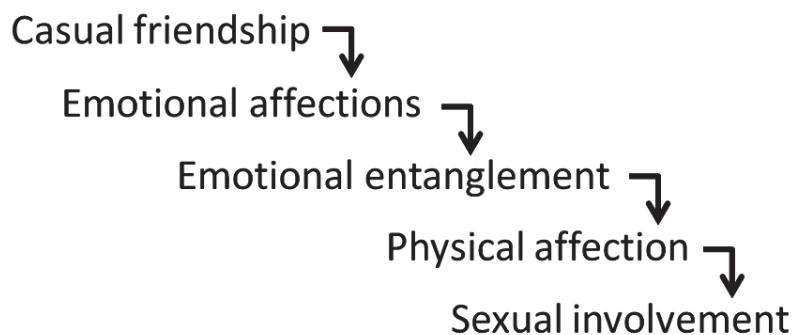
¹⁷ “Stolen water is sweet,

And bread eaten in secret is pleasant.”

¹⁸ But he does not know that the dead are there,

That her guests are in the depths of hell.

In most cases, a married man or woman does not get into an adulterous relationship suddenly. To go from a place of commitment to your own spouse to a place where you are accepting the idea that “*stolen water is sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant*” is a process. It’s usually a slow slide into an immoral relationship. It begins with a thought that the other person might be better than your spouse. The more you interact or spend time with the other person, the more convinced you become that your spouse is just not good enough. Soon you become dissatisfied with your own marriage. Emotional affections begin to develop. You constantly think and fantasize about the other person. Your interactions whether through personal meetings, phone calls, texting, or other means begin to increase. This is emotional entanglement. With emotional entanglement, there is an increasing interaction as well as increasing secrecy. It would not be long before you begin to show physical affection. And thereafter, the two fall into sexual sin. All this usually happens in the “dark.” Things are kept secret until exposed.



Why do people fall into this?

Very often, there are emotional hurts at the root. A feeling of being unloved by one's own spouse, a sense of rejection, unmet emotional needs, unfulfilled expectations, emotional pain or trauma, teenage affections, and fantasies that have not been dealt with—these and other similar emotional issues make a person vulnerable to extra-marital affairs.

Sometimes, living with low or no moral standards, willing to compromise on personal values, low commitment to the Lord and His Word, poor commitment to one's spouse, and low tolerance to sin, also make people vulnerable to immoral relationships.

For others, pride and a sense of entitlement that comes with success, position, power, or influence gets some people to go seeking for excitement outside their own marriage.

Be on double guard during times of personal crisis or triumph

2 Samuel 11:1-4 (The Message)

¹ When that time of year came around again, the anniversary of the Ammonite aggression, David dispatched Joab and his fighting men of Israel in full force to destroy the Ammonites for good. They laid siege to Rabbah, but David stayed in Jerusalem.

² One late afternoon, David got up from taking his nap and was strolling on the roof of the palace. From his vantage point on the roof he saw a woman bathing. The woman was stunningly beautiful.

³ David sent to ask about her, and was told, “Isn’t this Bathsheba, daughter of Eliam and wife of Uriah the Hittite?”

⁴ David sent his agents to get her. After she arrived, he went to bed with her. (This occurred during the time of “purification” following her period.) Then she returned home.

King David was a very godly man, a man who loved God deeply, and a man after God's own heart. David had accomplished much as the king of Israel. He had seen great victories and earned great respect from all his people. *“David became even more famous when he returned from killing eighteen thousand Edomites in Salt Valley. He set up military camps throughout Edom, and the people there became his subjects. The LORD made David victorious everywhere. David ruled over all of Israel and made sure that his people were always treated fairly and justly”* (2 Samuel 8:13-15, GNT). However, at a time when he was at his zenith, something disastrous happened. David saw Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah, a beautiful woman, and got her to himself and committed adultery. He then went on to commit murder to cover up his wrongdoing.

This incident teaches us something especially important. In our times of heightened success, we tend to let our guards down, and we become very vulnerable. This is also true of times of intense crises. During such times in our lives, our judgment is usually poor, and we tend to make wrong choices. We fall into things we normally would avoid and walk away from. It is important for us to be on double guard and to keep our defenses up and strong during times of great success or intense crisis. An impulsive, ill-thought of decision, that one-night-stand, or a moment of weakness can have long lasting consequences.

Don't trade enduring intimacies for cheap thrills

Proverbs 5:1-23 (The Message)

- ¹ Dear friend, pay close attention to this, my wisdom; listen very closely to the way I see it.
- ² Then you'll acquire a taste for good sense; what I tell you will keep you out of trouble.
- ³ The lips of a seductive woman are oh so sweet, her soft words are oh so smooth.
- ⁴ But it won't be long before she's gravel in your mouth, a pain in your gut, a wound in your heart.
- ⁵ She's dancing down the primrose path to Death; she's headed straight for Hell and taking you with her.
- ⁶ She hasn't a clue about Real Life, about who she is or where she's going.
- ⁷ So, my friend, listen closely; don't treat my words casually.
- ⁸ Keep your distance from such a woman; absolutely stay out of her neighborhood.
- ⁹ You don't want to squander your wonderful life, to waste your precious life among the hardhearted.
- ¹⁰ Why should you allow strangers to take advantage of you? Why be exploited by those who care nothing for you?
- ¹¹ You don't want to end your life full of regrets, nothing but sin and bones,
- ¹² Saying, "Oh, why didn't I do what they told me? Why did I reject a disciplined life?"
- ¹³ Why didn't I listen to my mentors, or take my teachers seriously?
- ¹⁴ My life is ruined! I haven't one blessed thing to show for my life!"
- ¹⁵ Do you know the saying, "Drink from your own rain barrel, draw water from your own spring-fed well"?
- ¹⁶ It's true. Otherwise, you may one day come home and find your barrel empty and your well polluted.
- ¹⁷ Your spring water is for you and you only, not to be passed around among strangers.
- ¹⁸ Bless your fresh-flowing fountain! Enjoy the wife you married as a young man!
- ¹⁹ Lovely as an angel, beautiful as a rose - don't ever quit taking delight in her body. Never take her love for granted!
- ²⁰ Why would you trade enduring intimacies for cheap thrills with a whore? for dalliance with a promiscuous stranger?
- ²¹ Mark well that God doesn't miss a move you make; he's aware of every step you take.
- ²² The shadow of your sin will overtake you; you'll find yourself stumbling all over yourself in the dark.
- ²³ Death is the reward of an undisciplined life; your foolish decisions trap you in a dead end.

Proverbs 5 contrasts the cheap thrills of engaging in an immoral relationship versus the enduring intimacy you can enjoy with your own spouse. The cheap thrill is momentary. It leaves you ruined. The enduring intimacy with your own spouse is like a *fresh-flowing fountain*. God's instruction is not to trade the enduring intimacy you can enjoy with your own wife with the cheap thrill of a seductress. Let this be branded in your own soul, your heart, and your mind. Nothing can replace what you enjoy with your own wife.

Adultery is a brainless act, soul-destroying, self-destructive

Proverbs 6:23-35 (The Message)

- ²³ For sound advice is a beacon, good teaching is a light, moral discipline is a life path.
- ²⁴ They'll protect you from wanton women, from the seductive talk of some temptress.
- ²⁵ Don't lustfully fantasize on her beauty, nor be taken in by her bedroom eyes.
- ²⁶ You can buy an hour with a whore for a loaf of bread, but a wanton woman may well eat you alive.
- ²⁷ Can you build a fire in your lap and not burn your pants?
- ²⁸ Can you walk barefoot on hot coals and not get blisters?
- ²⁹ It's the same when you have sex with your neighbor's wife: Touch her and you'll pay for it. No excuses.
- ³⁰ Hunger is no excuse for a thief to steal;
- ³¹ When he's caught he has to pay it back, even if he has to put his whole house in hock.
- ³² Adultery is a brainless act, soul-destroying, self-destructive;
- ³³ Expect a bloody nose, a black eye, and a reputation ruined for good.

³⁴ For jealousy detonates rage in a cheated husband; wild for revenge, he won't make allowances.

³⁵ Nothing you say or pay will make it all right; neither bribes nor reason will satisfy him.

Job 31:12 (The Message)

Adultery is a fire that burns the house down; I wouldn't expect anything I count dear to survive it.

The consequences of adultery can be severe. Adultery seems exciting, but that is momentary. Adultery is self-destructive. Let's understand the seriousness and make no excuses for ourselves.

Women, stay on guard

Proverbs 12:4 (GNT)

A good wife is her husband's pride and joy; but a wife who brings shame on her husband is like a cancer in his bones.

Proverbs 14:1 (GNT)

Homes are made by the wisdom of women, but are destroyed by foolishness.

Proverbs 30:20 (GNT)

This is how an unfaithful wife acts: she commits adultery, takes a bath, and says, "But I haven't done anything wrong!"

There are men who are perennial violators and look for vulnerable women who are willing to yield to their seductive pull. So, this is just a word to married and single women to always stay on guard from such men on the prowl. A wife's foolishness can destroy her home and bring shame and pain on her husband and children. Wives, remember you are your husband's pride and joy. Stand your ground. Let your husband be proud of you.

Women, dress modestly

1 Timothy 2:9,10 (GNT)

⁹I also want the women to be modest and sensible about their clothes and to dress properly; not with fancy hair styles or with gold ornaments or pearls or expensive dresses,

¹⁰but with good deeds, as is proper for women who claim to be religious.

1 Peter 3:1-6 (GNT)

¹In the same way you wives must submit yourselves to your husbands, so that if any of them do not believe God's word, your conduct will win them over to believe. It will not be necessary for you to say a word,

²because they will see how pure and reverent your conduct is.

³You should not use outward aids to make yourselves beautiful, such as the way you fix your hair, or the jewelry you put on, or the dresses you wear.

⁴Instead, your beauty should consist of your true inner self, the ageless beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of the greatest value in God's sight.

⁵For the devout women of the past who placed their hope in God used to make themselves beautiful by submitting themselves to their husbands.

⁶Sarah was like that; she obeyed Abraham and called him her master. You are now her daughters if you do good and are not afraid of anything.

Part of a women's defense and self-protection is to dress modestly. It should be well understood that men are turned on by what they see. So, when a woman is scantily or provocatively clothed, it obviously gets the attention of men. She is setting herself up for unnecessary trouble.

Taking the road to freedom

What if you as husband or wife have fallen into an emotional entanglement, engaged in adultery, or an immoral relationship and you want to get out? Is there hope? What is the way out?

Coming back strong

It is important to understand that there is no situation too hard or difficult for God to restore and redeem. No matter how far you have fallen, if you are willing to repent and turn to the Lord for help, He is able to rescue.

With God's help, you can recover. You can arise. You can come back strong. *"But me, I'm not giving up. I'm sticking around to see what God will do. I'm waiting for God to make things right. I'm counting on God to listen to me. Don't, enemy, crow over me. I'm down, but I'm not out. I'm sitting in the dark right now, but God is my light"* (Micah 7:7,8, The Message)

The Father's love

Once the prodigal son came to his senses and realized that what he had done only ruined his life and brought him to the lowest depths, he decided to return to his father's home (Luke 15:11-24). That was the only thing left. As he journeyed home, he was willing to just be treated as a servant in his father's house. He was preparing for a reception of shame and humiliation. However, he was welcomed with the most unexpected love, endowed with the best robe, a ring, and great celebration. This was a picture the Lord Jesus painted for us to get a glimpse of the love that God has for us. The Father's love is immensely greater, superior, and stronger than any human love. Nothing can separate us from the love that God has for us in Christ. We can rest assured that if we return like the prodigal son back to the Lord, He will welcome us with arms of love.

Shepherd of my soul

The Lord is the Shepherd of our souls. He is very interested even in the one wayward lost sheep. He is the Good Shepherd who goes looking for the one lost sheep and celebrates when He finds it (Luke 15:4-7). *"For you were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls."* (1 Peter 2:25). He can restore and make us whole once again (Psalm 23:3). Have assurance in the fact that God longs for us to return to Him, and when we do, He is able to mend us, restore us, and make us whole.

Out of the ashes we rise

God by the power of His Holy Spirit can turn things around in our lives. His anointing, the presence and power of His Holy Spirit is here *"To console those who mourn in Zion, To give them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they may be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that He may be glorified"* (Isaiah 61:3). The Holy Spirit can do this in your life as well. He can turn our mourning into dancing, put off our sackcloth, and clothe us with gladness (Psalm 30:11).

A journey of a thousand miles

Falling into adultery is like falling into a trap. You find your feet caught in the net. As you look to the Lord, He steps in to rescue your feet from the net in which you are trapped. “*My eyes are ever toward the LORD, For He shall pluck my feet out of the net*” (Psalm 25:15).

Remember that the Lord is here “*to bring out prisoners from the prison, those who sit in darkness from the prison house*” (Isaiah 42:7). He will open the prison doors but you must walk out into your freedom. It may seem like a long, painful road to recovery, but even a journey of a thousand miles begins with one step. And you make the journey one step at a time. Each step you take brings you closer to your freedom.

This journey begins by you calling sin as sin. You need to stop rationalizing and excusing your sin. You need to get rid of the lies you believed. Lies that said your adulterous relationship was okay. Lies that said that you just can’t help it. Lies that said that you deserve to have someone else instead of your spouse. No excuses. Sin is sin, and you stand answerable most of all to God.

Then you need to recognize the seriousness of what you have done, how you have fallen, how you have messed up and ruined your own life and the lives of others connected to you. There must be a recognition of the sin and what it has caused. Experiencing pain and remorse over what has happened is essential and good because “*godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation*” (2 Corinthians 7:10). There must be repentance, humility, and taking responsibility for the wrong that has been done.

Then comes a challenging step. The step to cut off, to break the ties that bind you to the other person with whom you engaged in an extra-marital affair. Breaking off this emotional entanglement can be difficult but is necessary if you are going to be completely free.

Cutting off to break free

Matthew 5:27-30 (GNT)

²⁷ “You have heard that it was said, ‘Do not commit adultery.’

²⁸ But now I tell you: anyone who looks at a woman and wants to possess her is guilty of committing adultery with her in his heart.

²⁹ So if your right eye causes you to sin, take it out and throw it away! It is much better for you to lose a part of your body than to have your whole body thrown into hell.

³⁰ If your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away! It is much better for you to lose one of your limbs than to have your whole body go off to hell.

The Lord Jesus taught us how to deal with sin. He used adultery as an example. As far as He is concerned, emotional adultery is the same as physical adultery. The desire to possess for immoral reasons is the same as committing the act. This must be dealt with severity. He described it in terms similar to amputation, a painful cutting off what is offensive and causing one to sin.

Breaking free from an extra-marital affair, from an immoral relationship, from an emotional entanglement is the same. It requires amputation. It must be dealt with severity. It will be painful, but there is no other way.

Recognize what led you into this immoral relationship and reverse the choices you made. Stop spending time with the person. Stop interactions and other communication with the person. If you need to relocate, change jobs, or take an extended break, do whatever is required to stay completely away from the person with whom you have sinned.

Beware of satan's deceptions and other lies that will invite you to compromise and accommodate a little bit of the other person in your life. Remember, if you give sin an inch, it will take a yard. Don't give the devil any access and any foothold in your life (Ephesians 4:27). What you tolerate will eventually dominate. So have zero tolerance for any contact or association with the other person. You are doing this for your benefit as well as for the benefit of the other person.

Get the help of your pastor, spiritual mentor, or counselor to walk with you through this process. Be honest. Be accountable. Be consistent. As you keep chopping away little by little, eventually, you will be able to cut right through.

Reconciliation and healing—the offender and the offended

Adultery is devastating to any marriage. The spouse who has been betrayed goes through immense pain and needs help and support through this time. It will take a lot of grace for the offended spouse to forgive, reconcile, and see the marriage restored. The offended spouse needs time to work through this emotionally. It will not be easy. Some may be able to make this journey. Some may not and may choose to end the marriage, which we know is scripturally permitted. Either way, the offended spouse needs to release forgiveness even though what has happened is real and cannot be reversed. Work toward having a heart of love and without offense. We are called to love as God loves. The offended spouse will need the grace to live out much of what we have learned from the Scriptures in Chapters 10 to 12 in this manual. Get the help of a pastor, counselor, trusted friend, or group of friends to help you journey through this and come to a place of wholeness.

The offender, the spouse who committed adultery, needs to receive forgiveness, and accept and honor the decision of the spouse who has been offended. Choose to walk in love without retaliation regardless of the decision that has been made. The person will also have to deal with the root cause of this problem so that it does not become a repetitive behavior pattern. The ax must be laid to the root. It will be useful to get the help of a pastor or counselor to work through this.

The Lord can make all things new. It is beautiful to see a husband and wife who have endured the crisis of infidelity and have still come out strong, together, and faithful to each other. While the journey itself is not easy, there is sufficient grace available and there is the beauty of God released and reflected through the healing and reconciliation.

Even if such a married couple who have encountered the crisis of infidelity go their separate ways, we need to be loving, supportive, and encourage everyone to still pursue God's purpose for their lives. Some things cannot be reversed, but God is able to help redeem and raise each person up to their highest and best in Him.

Establish moral fences and stay within boundaries

1 Peter 5:8

Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.

Job 31:1 (GNT)

I have made a solemn promise
never to look with lust at a woman.

Proverbs 2:11-19 (GNT)

¹¹ Your insight and understanding will protect you
¹² and prevent you from doing the wrong thing. They will keep you away from people who stir up trouble by what they say—
¹³ those who have abandoned a righteous life to live in the darkness of sin,
¹⁴ those who find pleasure in doing wrong and who enjoy senseless evil,
¹⁵ unreliable people who cannot be trusted.
¹⁶ You will be able to resist any immoral woman who tries to seduce you with her smooth talk,
¹⁷ who is faithless to her own husband and forgets her sacred vows.
¹⁸ If you go to her house, you are traveling the road to death. To go there is to approach the world of the dead.
¹⁹ No one who visits her ever comes back. He never returns to the road to life.

The purpose of this chapter is to alert us to this dangerous pitfall that is best avoided with all caution. While there is hope for any casualty, it is best to be preventive and to ensure that our marriages are secured from the sin of infidelity. Hence, it is important for both husband and wife to establish moral fences and stay within boundaries. Think this through for yourself and establish boundaries in your own mind and heart in how you will relate to the opposite sex. You know your own areas of vulnerability and hence, do your utmost to guard your sexual affections and appetites. When you are going through times of success or crisis, be on double guard.

Keep your boundaries firm. Developing discipline in the way you interact with the opposite sex can go a long way in securing your marriage.

Here are a few practical tips that can help.

- Maintain emotional and sexual fulfillment within your own marriage. Don't let boredom sneak into your marriage. Laugh. Do fun things. Clown around. Have fun. This is an important preventive measure you can take. The more satisfied you are with your own marriage and family, the less likely you are to look outside.
- Don't do something you would not like your spouse to be doing.
- Avoid being away from your spouse for extended periods of time. This is especially true for those who must travel frequently. Stay connected with your spouse regularly.
- If you are a working professional, do not pair up with a colleague of the opposite sex for business trips.

- Refrain from going out alone, taking drives / rides with someone of the opposite sex other than your spouse.
- Be careful about your chatting, use of social media, and other online interactions with the opposite sex. Be transparent and open about your mails, messages, and social networking messages. Share passwords.
- Guard your mind, your thoughts, imaginations, feelings, and affections. The moment you feel wrong thoughts or affections being aroused toward someone of the opposite gender, deal with it. Take it to God in prayer. Consecrate your thoughts and affections. Cast out evil thoughts and affections.
- Maintain your internal boundaries—make a commitment to being careful not to “think” of someone of the opposite sex in your mind. We need to be aware that that the thinking space is only reserved for our spouse. When we break the internal boundaries, it is only a matter of time before it creeps into our actions.
- Speak positively about your spouse in your conversation with others.
- Avoid giving overtly personal compliments to those of the opposite sex.
- Be careful in your interactions with that person toward whom you may have some feelings or who you sense has certain romantic feelings toward you. Don’t express your feelings or give any indications of it to the other person.
- Don’t flirt. Don’t play with the other person’s emotions by dropping hints and other things that arouse romantic interest.
- Stay away from pornography, and other related things that cause you to sin in the area of sexuality.
- Avoid counseling someone of the opposite sex alone.
- Avoid discussing personal problems or emotional topics with someone of the opposite sex. This can be a signal for emotional intimacy.
- Be intentional about severing past relationships.
- Establish any other boundaries that are relevant to your situation. Be brutally honest with yourself in this area. Don’t fool yourself. You are no angel!
- If you are single, establish these boundaries now so that you will be strong in this area once you are married.

APPLICATION

In the light of what we have covered in this chapter, reflect on the following:

- 1) Evaluate how you have been interacting with the opposite sex in your workplace or other social situations. Are there changes you need to make? Are there stricter boundaries and moral fences you need to set for your own life?

- 2) Consider a few concrete ways you can regularly affirm your love and affection to your own spouse. Start doing this regularly (daily).

TURNING POINT

Pray over the following for your own life.

In prayer, ask the Lord to help you establish strong moral boundaries for yourself. Ask God to give you wisdom to guard yourself and stay away from any snare of the enemy.

ACTION ITEM

If appropriate, get a copy and read through the book “*The Snare: Understanding Emotional and Sexual Entanglements*” by Lois Mowday Rabey.

14

PARENTING PRIMER

In this chapter, we share biblical and practical insights on parenting with the intent of laying a foundation for our role as parents (or when you do become parents). We encourage you to study the remaining chapter in this manual even if you are going through your premarital preparation or are newly married as these lessons will prepare you well in advance for what is coming up.

Embrace your call to be a parent

Malachi 2:15 (GNT)

Didn't God make you one body and spirit with her? What was his purpose in this? It was that you should have children who are truly God's people. So make sure that none of you breaks his promise to his wife.

This Scripture teaches us that one of God's purposes in uniting husband and wife in marriage is so that they could have children who are raised up as God's people (or as the New King James puts it "*godly offspring*"). God instituted marriage and so everything that happens under that institution is also something divinely appointed by God. Parenting or raising up godly offspring therefore, is a divine call, an invitation to co-labor with God in carrying out His purpose. Parenting then, is a God-ordained activity and hence, a "ministry" itself.

Represent the Heavenly Father

Ephesians 3:14,15 (GNT)

**¹⁴For this reason I fall on my knees before the Father,
¹⁵from whom every family in heaven and on earth receives its true name.**

Psalm 127:3

**Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD,
The fruit of the womb is a reward.**

God is our heavenly Father. He has a family—part of His family is in heaven and part of His family is on earth. The entire family receives its name—origin, being, identity, and security—from the Father. All fatherhood flows from God who is the ultimate Father.

Children are an inheritance from the Lord. This means that children belong to God but have been entrusted to us. Parenting then is a call to represent the Father God to the children He has entrusted to us.

As parents, we know we are flawed and imperfect. Most of us are still learning what parenting is all about. And during all of this, we are called to represent the Father God to our children. This is of course very daunting. And yet, this should be our aim and desire—to represent God to our children. Our desire should be that our children will see God in us and through us and that our children will get an accurate picture of God, and get a glimpse of the heart of the Father in and through our lives.

Give unconditional love

Ephesians 3:17-19 (GNT)

¹⁷and I pray that Christ will make his home in your hearts through faith. I pray that you may have your roots and foundation in love,

¹⁸so that you, together with all God's people, may have the power to understand how broad and long, how high and deep, is Christ's love.

¹⁹Yes, may you come to know his love—although it can never be fully known—and so be completely filled with the very nature of God.

In the same passage where the apostle Paul points out to us that the entire family in heaven and earth receives its name from the Father God, Paul goes on to describe the unlimited nature of God's love. The love of God is immeasurable and unconditional. There are no limits and there are no conditions. He loves us because He is love. We need to extend the God-kind of love to our children in order to represent the heart of the Father God to them. Our children need to know that they are always loved—when they are exceptional in their behavior and even when they disappoint us. As parents, we love them regardless of performance. We still believe in them. We still desire the best for them. Everything we do should be birthed and undergirded by this unconditional love.

Become your child's "role model"

Proverbs 17:6 (The Message)

Old people are distinguished by grandchildren; children take pride in their parents.

Proverbs 20:7 (The Message)

God-loyal people, living honest lives, make it much easier for their children.

A role model is a person looked to by others as an example, as someone to be followed, emulated, and imitated. Role models are essentially people who are admired and hence, emulated in one or more areas of living. Through personal character, achievements or other success, role models influence behavior, affect attitudes, inspire dreams, and motivate action even without direct involvement.

For children, their parents are their first "heroes" or "role models." Children take pride in their parents. Children inherently tend to want to be like their parents to begin with. This is a privileged position of influence that parents have by default in the lives of their own children to start off with. Add to this the opportunity for direct and ongoing involvement in the lives of their own children. As parents, we have a great opportunity before us to shape and mold the lives entrusted to us. We can either build on this and have a strong positive influence or with time, lose out and have no lasting positive influence on our children.

Through the way we interact, in our attitudes, behaviors, words, and actions, we need to consciously model to our children the kind of people God desires us to be. Influence can be instructional, but mostly comes through example. Who we are and what we do is more powerful than all that we say. Children need to see us walk the talk. Then they will give weight to the words we speak. When they see us living godly lives, honoring God, and walking in His ways, it makes it so much easier for them to emulate this kind of life. They know it can be done. They see it being done before their very eyes.

As parents, we are our child's first teachers, and we have a great influence on our children's behavior. Children are like sponges—they absorb into their own lives what they hear and see us do. This means that both the good and the bad gets impressed upon them. Children learn their social skills, basic things like saying "please," "thank you," "welcome," and "sorry" from parents. They also learn how to speak to people and speak about people from their parents. They learn positive attitudes and behaviors such as generosity, being forgiving, taking responsibility, apologizing for mistakes, patience, and endurance from parents. How we as parents handle stress and conflict will influence how children learn to react to similar situations. If we shout, scream, get angry, and get out of control, it is likely that they will follow too, unless they are helped to unlearn this at a later stage. Determine to set a non-violent and non-aggressive response to conflict and completely rule out verbal or physical abuse.

As parents, we must be very careful that we unlearn some of the mistakes we saw our own parents make while bringing us up. Our parents may have been forceful, strict disciplinarians, controlling, and may have had other behaviors that were essentially unhealthy, but they did not know better. We must consciously model what is good and healthy, most of all, what is holy and pleasing in God's eyes to our children.

List some of the character traits, behaviors, and positive attitudes you would like to see your children have. Then think through on ways you can consistently model this to them through your own lifestyle.

Character	Behavior	Attitudes
(Example: honesty)	(Example: being)	(Example: being confident)

Train for life

Proverbs 22:6 (GNT)

Teach children how they should live, and they will remember it all their life.

Proverbs 20:11 (GNT)

Even children show what they are by what they do; you can tell if they are honest and good.

As parents, in as much as we are responsible to provide, love, and care for our children, we are also responsible for training them for life. This has not only to do with giving them an education but more importantly teaching them how to live. Teaching them how to live has to do with imparting to them values, principles, disciplines, and life-skills. This is a progressive journey. Some of these they pick up early on in life. Values and principles are imbibed early and quickly. If we as parents place importance on honesty, integrity, and truthfulness, they will do so too. So, as parents, we need to

intentionally work at imparting values, principles, disciplines, and life-skills to our children and do so at each stage of their growth and development.

As a parent, list out some key values, principles, and life-skills that you would like to personally impart to your children and then think through on ways you can develop and teach those to your children.

Values / Principles	Disciplines	Life-skills
(Example: honesty)	(Example: punctuality)	(Example: proper communication skills)

Understand your children

Psalm 127:3-5

³Behold, children *are* a heritage from the LORD,
The fruit of the womb *is* a reward.
⁴Like arrows in the hand of a warrior,
So *are* the children of one's youth.
⁵Happy *is* the man who has his quiver full of them;
They shall not be ashamed,
But shall speak with their enemies in the gate.

Each child is unique and different. Even among children born in the same family, each child is different. The Bible draws an interesting picture between arrows and children.

- **Arrows need to be aimed before they are released**—talks to us about training and equipping our children into what is best for them.
- **Arrows are weapons that can inflict defeat and cause victory**—talks to us about the fact that children themselves can be mighty on the earth and have impact and influence. “*The good man's children will be powerful in the land; his descendants will be blessed*” (Psalm 112:2, GNT).
- **Arrows can be released to travel varying distances based on the energy with which they are released**—talks to us about the fact that if we prepare them well and release them right, they can “go far” and accomplish much.
- **A quiver full of arrows**—talks to us about defense and protection which grown up children bring to their parents.

Before we can set our children in the right direction, equip, and prepare them for maximum impact in their lives, we need to understand them well. As parents, this is part of our responsibility.

We must take time and make an effort to understand each child entrusted to us. Observe what things interest them, what challenges them, and what inspires them. Talk and listen to them. Let them share their thoughts and feelings. Observe their behavior and interactions with others. Do things with them. Through such times that we engage with our children, we will begin to understand them and then be able to help guide them into maximizing their potential, ready to be released as sharpened arrows.

Grow up with your children

As children transition through varying stages of their growth and development, how we relate, teach, train, and discipline them will also change. We need to change how we engage with them through these stages. Broadly speaking, we differentiate these stages as childhood (0 to 5), pre-school (6 to 12), adolescence (12 to 18), young adults (18 to 21) and then they move on to adulthood. The things we teach and how we instruct them and discipline them will change. Time moves “quickly” and so we must also learn to adapt and work with them.

Changing engagement modes

Stages (ages)	Engagement
Infant / Toddlers (0-2)	Nurturing, caring
Preschoolers (2-5)	Playmate, guide
Elementary (6-12)	Instructive, disciplining, authoritative
Teens (12-18)	Teammate, participatory, disciplining, encouraging, empowering, equipping, supporting, reasoning.
Young adults (18-21)	Influencing, coach, mentor, collaborating, empowering, equipping, supporting, reasoning
Adults (21+)	Advisory, conversing, sharing ideas, experiences, respecting opinions

Understand teenage transitions

Teenagers are working on discovering and establishing their interests, identity, security, beliefs, and other important values. They experiment. They try things out. They explore. It is important that as parents, we understand and work positively with our teenagers.

When the teenager says	This could be incorrectly perceived as	What is really being expressed ... how the parent can engage and what the parent can help develop
Don't tell me what to do, I will make up my own mind...	Defiance	<i>I'm learning to take charge, be in control, be a leader.</i> Parents can encourage independent thinking and decision making. Wait for decisions to be shared and then if required, lovingly point out better ways to analyze the gaps in the thought process.
That's not the way my friends do it.	Conformist (yielding to peer-pressure)	<i>I'd like to fit in, be accepted by my friends. Don't want to stand out, but I can be my own self. Trust me.</i> Parents can encourage participation and interaction with friends but lovingly remind how to stand for values and maintain boundaries and what to do in situations where values may be challenged.

I'll think about this... or I don't agree...	Opinionated	<i>I'd like to be heard and feel that my ideas are important too.</i> Parents can encourage sharing of their thoughts and ideas and appreciate the positives in their points of view. Where appropriate, enlarge or expand their perspective or challenge them to evaluate differing opinions.
I'd like to be with my friends and spend time with them instead.	Independent	<i>I'd like to have some freedom. I'd like to be trusted that I know how to take care of myself.</i> Parents can encourage socializing with friends without compromising on priorities (Example: Studies, being at church on Sundays, etc.). Lovingly remind their boundaries (be home by 7 p.m., etc.).
I'm not bothered by what others think about me. I want to do what I feel like.	Rebellious	<i>I'd like to experiment and establish my own interests and identity.</i> Parents can encourage experimenting with ideas, lovingly showing first how to evaluate ideas / concepts ensuring they are worth pursuing and then encouraging them to try out, and re-evaluate outcome.
I am not sure if I am ready for this.	Insecure	<i>I'm feeling self-conscious. Can you help build my confidence?</i> Parents can encourage and build confidence, remove fear of failure. Show that there is nothing wrong in attempting something and learning from it.

Discipline without destroying

Ephesians 6:4 (GNT)

Parents, do not treat your children in such a way as to make them angry. Instead, raise them with Christian discipline and instruction.

Colossians 3:21 (The Message)

Parents, don't come down too hard on your children or you'll crush their spirits.

All of us understand the need for discipline, especially in the context of training children. The objective of discipline is to teach, train, and develop and not to inflict punishment or cause pain. The danger of an authoritarian approach that hands out overly strict discipline is that it could cause anger to build up in children or it could even crush their spirits harming or damaging them emotionally.

This means that as parents, we need to learn various *methods of discipline* that are healthy, suited to the stage of growth of the child, and relevant to what we are trying to teach and impart to the child.

1) Keep discipline positive

Excessive or violent use of the spanker, use of other objects to spank, shouting, screaming, verbal abuse, verbal insults, intimidation, guilt, negative pronouncements about their future, and undue pressure are all unhealthy ways of administering discipline. Nothing constructive comes out of such interactions. Most of us parents have fallen into some of these at some point, and came out realizing

that all we did was waste our energy and made matters worse. At least we learned how not to discipline and hopefully, quickly corrected ourselves.

The way parents discipline greatly affects their children's behavior. Consider several positive forms of discipline—explaining right and wrong and consequences, loss of certain privileges, enforcing time-outs, enforcing other restrictions, delay in obtaining certain things until conditions are met, etc. Essentially, discipline is to be educational, a time of learning where we modify the child's bad behavior in a loving, positive, and calm manner.

2) Relationship before rules

We need to establish and keep developing a meaningful relationship with our children and based on that relationship, we communicate rules. We need to touch their hearts before we can influence their thoughts and actions. When you engage with what interests them, then they pay attention to what is important to you. When they know that you genuinely care, take time to listen, and are willing to understand them, then they embrace the rules you set because they are themselves assured that you have their best interests at heart. Obedience will come out of a desire to please the one they love and appreciate rather than out of morbid fear of consequences.

3) Boundaries that are understood

Boundaries set by parents need to be clear and consistent. There are some boundaries that never change. For example, no cheating, no lying, no stealing, and other similar boundaries that have to do with building character and values are firm, fixed, and do not change. There may be other boundaries that change depending on certain conditions. For example, what time they need to be back home in the evenings after play, what time they need to go to bed, when they can and cannot have friends over at home, and so on. As children grow up, they like to know why such boundaries have been set. Take time to explain why. Be reasonable. Let them understand and soon they will be able to make decisions based on what they have understood.

4) Increasing responsibility with autonomy

With maturity comes more freedom to make decisions (autonomy) but also responsibility. This means, as parents, we also learn to gradually give up our control without giving up involvement. Our way of involvement moves from instruction (do this, don't do this) to participation (follow me, here's how to do this) to influence (I think this is a better option. What do you think?). We need to give children room to grow.

Some areas where there needs to be freedom with strict boundaries are in the use of the Internet, use of digital devices, and socializing (spending time with friends). Clearly explain the boundaries for the use of the Internet or digital devices, which you may have given them. Explain the kinds of things they could see and what they must avoid online. Set boundaries. Similarly, with their choice of friends and the time they spend socializing. Monitor what your kids see, read, or how and with whom they spend time. Ask questions regularly but in a polite and genuinely interested manner. Know what they are learning online or what is happening with their friends. Lovingly correct and guide if you find anything going wrong.

5) Parents be in agreement

This perhaps is a very challenging area for most parents. Each parent comes with their own personal experience of their growing up years and how their parents dealt with them, and hence, their own understanding of how best to work with their children. It is possible that there could be a conflict in each parent's parenting style. Parents themselves coming to a place of agreement and parenting in unison is important. Remember, nurture children in teamwork. Both husband and wife should be involved and should be in agreement.

We have provided an exercise at the end of this chapter which we recommend all young parents to work through so that there will be agreement in how you work together in disciplining and nurturing your children.

Parenting styles

Authoritarian	Authoritative	Permissive	Uninvolved
controlling, demanding, directive, rules without relationship, very little show of love and acceptance	firm about limits, rules with strong relationship, involved with child, but also loving and accepting	few or no limits, almost no rules but good relationship, involved with child also loving and accepting	disengaged, uninterested, little or no involvement
Generalized outcomes Child could become very angry and resentful toward any kind of authority (parent, principal, pastor, prime minister). Child could become broken and weak on the inside emotionally, lack confidence, self-esteem, motivation, etc., needing a lot of rebuilding.	Generalized outcomes Child understands boundaries, right and wrong, the value of compliance and thriving within given boundaries. Child develops the ability to discern right and wrong, to stand up for what is right and choose what they will accept and have strength to say "No" to negatives.	Generalized outcomes Child may be surprised that the real world has boundaries and may struggle with it (Example: Workplace, marriage, other situations). May not take well to rules and regulations. Child could be easily influenced as there is no sense of right and wrong; accepts anything and everything without seeing the need to discern and stand up for what is right.	Generalized outcomes Child could go either way. Could become resilient and learn to be independent and grow up quickly. Could end up wandering aimlessly without a sense of direction, lost and could waste time and resources.
<p>The comments above are generalized statements. In reality, children will adapt as they grow and depending on other role models, mentors, and leaders whom they come into contact with, can still develop positively as they unlearn wrong things and learn positives.</p>			

Being authoritative, firm about the boundaries we set, clear about our expectations, and involved with our children, while being always loving and accepting is what children really need from us as parents. This brings about the balance of clear guidance with supportive encouragement that children need to grow, mature, and thrive.

6) No partiality

Isaac and Rebekah had two sons, Esau and Jacob, twins, but since Esau came out first, he was considered the elder. However, we see in Rebekah, a mother who preferred Jacob over Esau (Genesis 27) and her interference and preferential treatment of one over another sowed discord between the two brothers and divided the family.

Jacob had 12 sons and he loved one of them, Joseph, more than the rest. This obviously caused the rest to be against Joseph. *“Jacob loved Joseph more than all his other sons, because he had been born to him when he was old. He made a long robe with full sleeves for him. When his brothers saw that their father loved Joseph more than he loved them, they hated their brother so much that they would not speak to him in a friendly manner”* (Genesis 37:3,4, GNT).

As parents, we must never be partial toward any one of our children. Sure, there may be certain needs or gender-related differences that we as parents may have to deal with differently, but these need to be explained to all children, understood, and every child assured of fair and equal love and treatment from both parents.

7) Affirm and appreciate what is right

Affirm good behavior and use positive reinforcement to consolidate good behavior in your child. God Himself affirms the one who does what is right. Some examples of this, God accepted Abel’s sacrifice but rejected Cain’s. God stated that He loved Jacob, but hated Esau (Malachi 1:2,3). God commands the one who does what is right. *“Whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him”* (Acts 10:35).

Similarly, as parents, by saying simple things like, “Well done!” “That’s a really good choice,” “I’m glad you did that,” etc., we affirm good behavior. Sometimes, doing other things, like a special dinner, a gift, a celebration, etc. to affirm good behavior or achievement also positively reinforces this in the lives of our children.

8) Handle things at the first instant

The story of David and how he dealt with his son Absalom brings out some important lessons. Absalom was offended because his sister Tamar had been violated by his half-brother Amnon (2 Samuel 13). Even though David had heard about this and was angry, he didn’t do anything about what had happened. Finally, Absalom took matters into his own hands and had his half-brother Amnon killed. Absalom fled for his life. After some time, David had Absalom return to Jerusalem, but for two years, he still didn’t go out to meet his son Absalom (2 Samuel 14:28). Eventually Absalom led a rebellion against his own father David. One of the important factors that led to Absalom’s rebellion could have been David’s inaction. Even though he knew of the wrong that had been done, he did not step in and address

the matter. It teaches us an important lesson that we need to address matters as soon as possible. Don't ignore wrong behaviors or wrong attitudes that you see in children. Take them aside and address the matter lovingly. Be direct and be strong.

9) Don't engage in pointless arguments

Sometimes, children or teenagers can begin to engage in arguments or get into a debate about things. It is best not to continue with the argument. Pause. Put things on hold. Later, when tempers have simmered down and when there is a willingness to learn, talk about the matter peacefully explaining what needs to be explained.

10) Give yourself a time-out

When children misbehave and disappoint, it is easy to get "worked-up" about the situation. It is likely that you will overreact and say and do things that are not right. The best thing to do is give yourself time to calm down, think through about how best to handle the situation, pray, get God's wisdom, and then come back to address the situation. There is nothing wrong in saying, "Ok John, I see you've done this once again. We will need to talk about this and see how to sort this out. Let's sit down and work through this tomorrow evening."

11) Always bring closure with love and security

Always affirm your unconditional love for your child even after an intense time of discipline. You love your child regardless of performance. Take your child alone and give him / her a good hug. Tell them you love them. If you have been too harsh in disciplining your child or have misjudged the situation and wrongfully disciplined your child, learn to accept your mistakes, and say that you are sorry. Learn to recognize your mistakes and acknowledge and apologize. This is a learning experience for children as they learn that it is alright to recognize our mistakes, accept responsibility, apologize, and work on correcting ourselves.

Require obedience

Proverbs 13:24 (The Message)

A refusal to correct is a refusal to love; love your children by disciplining them.

Proverbs 19:18 (The Message)

Discipline your children while you still have the chance; indulging them destroys them.

Proverbs 23:13,14 (GNT)

¹³Don't hesitate to discipline children. A good spanking won't kill them.

¹⁴As a matter of fact, it may save their lives.

Proverbs 29:15 (GNT)

Correction and discipline are good for children. If they have their own way, they will make their mothers ashamed of them.

Proverbs 29:17

Correct your son, and he will give you rest; Yes, he will give delight to your soul.

The Scripture does instruct us as parents on the importance of requiring obedience through loving correction. Training children to obey, correcting them, and guiding them is what we need to do as parents for the well-being of our children.

We need to teach children how to establish order in their lives by having a daily routine. Give them a list of their daily chores that are suitable for their age. Share specific expectations of them in behavior, their academics, their responsibilities at home, and so on. Lovingly correct and discipline them for disobedience. Commend, appreciate, and encourage their obedience.

Remember that even God who is our loving heavenly Father disciplines us, His children. Administering loving discipline therefore, is part of representing our heavenly Father and the nature of a loving God to our children.

Hebrews 12:5-11 (GNT)

⁵Have you forgotten the encouraging words which God speaks to you as his children?

“My child, pay attention when the Lord corrects you,
and do not be discouraged when he rebukes you.

**⁶Because the Lord corrects everyone he loves,
and punishes everyone he accepts as a child.”**

⁷Endure what you suffer as being a father’s punishment; your suffering shows that God is treating you as his children. Was there ever a child who was not punished by his father?

⁸If you are not punished, as all his children are, it means you are not real children, but bastards.

⁹In the case of our human fathers, they punished us and we respected them. How much more, then, should we submit to our spiritual Father and live!

¹⁰Our human fathers punished us for a short time, as it seemed right to them; but God does it for our own good, so that we may share his holiness.

¹¹When we are punished, it seems to us at the time something to make us sad, not glad. Later, however, those who have been disciplined by such punishment reap the peaceful reward of a righteous life.

Children need a biblical concept of authority. They need to be aware that it is a blessing to submit to the structures and arrangement of authority that God has placed in a family. Thus, God has given each parent the authority to nurture and bring up their children through discipline and correction. It is a good and godly thing to require obedience and for children to learn to obey.

Obedience protects children as they grow in maturity. As children grow and mature, they need necessary rules and guidance from their parents to prepare them for what lies ahead. Under the guidance of the parents, children are being groomed to be independent adults. Obedience to parents during the childhood years trains them to be obedient to God and His Word. Obedience to parents positions children to receive blessing on their lives (Ephesians 6:2,3).

Deal with foolishness by imparting wisdom

Proverbs 10:1

**A wise son makes a glad father,
But a foolish son is the grief of his mother.**

Proverbs 17:21 (GNT)

There is nothing but sadness and sorrow for parents whose children do foolish things.

Proverbs 17:25 (GNT)

Foolish children bring grief to their fathers and bitter regrets to their mothers.

Proverbs 19:13a (GNT)

Stupid children can bring their parents to ruin.

Proverbs 22:15

Foolishness *is bound up in the heart of a child;*
The rod of correction will drive it far from him.

Proverbs 4:3-12

³ When I was my father's son,
Tender and the only one in the sight of my mother,
⁴ He also taught me, and said to me:
“Let your heart retain my words;
Keep my commands, and live.
⁵ Get wisdom! Get understanding!
Do not forget, nor turn away from the words of my mouth.
⁶ Do not forsake her, and she will preserve you;
Love her, and she will keep you.
⁷ Wisdom is the principal thing;
Therefore get wisdom.
And in all your getting, get understanding.
⁸ Exalt her, and she will promote you;
She will bring you honor, when you embrace her.
⁹ She will place on your head an ornament of grace;
A crown of glory she will deliver to you.”
¹⁰ Hear, my son, and receive my sayings,
And the years of your life will be many.
¹¹ I have taught you in the way of wisdom;
I have led you in right paths.
¹² When you walk, your steps will not be hindered,
And when you run, you will not stumble.

Foolishness could mean being unwise, careless, lacking right judgment, gullible, being easily influenced by fads, and so on. It is part of our responsibility as parents to ensure that our children gain wisdom and understanding so that they are rid of foolishness and develop the ability to walk the right path making right choices and decisions.

APPLICATION

In the light of what we have covered in this chapter, reflect on the following:

- 1) As husband and wife (or fiancé), discuss the parenting styles you grew up with (teenage to 21 years), and positively assess the pros and cons of your experience.

My upbringing	Pros (I could reuse)	Cons (I should not repeat)
How I was taught about faith in God		
How I was taught values / principles		
How I was corrected for wrongdoing		
How I was affirmed for doing right		
How I learned social skills		
How I learned attitudes for life		
How my parents reacted to my failures		
How my parents reacted to my success		
How I was taught to do chores at home		
How I was taught to handle money		
How my parents handled conflict between them		
How my parents handled crises		
My role models and their influence on me		

- 2) As husband and wife (or fiancé), having understood each other's upbringing, discuss your intended and preferred approach to training, disciplining, and nurturing your children. Share your thoughts and dreams for your children.
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-
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- 3) As husband and wife (or fiancé), now try to come to a consensus and arrive at concrete approaches on how you would engage in unison when working with your children.

Areas	Our combined approach
How we will teach our children about faith in God	
How we will teach children values / principles	
How we will teach our children personal disciplines (cleanliness, punctuality, etc.)	

How we will correct our children for wrongdoing	
How we will affirm them for doing right	
How we will teach our children social skills	
How we will teach our children positive attitudes for life	
How we will react to / handle their failures	
How we will react to / handle their success	
How we will teach them to do chores at home	
How we will teach them to handle money	
How we will handle conflict in a manner that has a positive effect on our children	
How we should handle crises in a manner that has positive effect on our children	
Role models that we can encourage them to consider (other than ourselves)	

TURNING POINT

Pray over the following for your own life.

Pray together that God will give you wisdom to parent your children right, that you will set a godly example, be good role models, and nurture them in what God desires them to become.

ACTION ITEM

Take some time to review and learn about parenting from www.biblicalparenting.org



15

NURTURING CHILDREN

The instructions of a father

Genesis 18:19 (GNT)

I have chosen him in order that he may command his sons and his descendants to obey me and to do what is right and just. If they do, I will do everything for him that I have promised.”

Joshua 24:15 (GNT)

If you are not willing to serve him, decide today whom you will serve, the gods your ancestors worshiped in Mesopotamia or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are now living. As for my family and me, we will serve the Lord.”

Malachi 4:5,6

**“Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet
Before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord.**

“And he will turn

**The hearts of the fathers to the children,
And the hearts of the children to their fathers,
Lest I come and strike the earth with a curse.”**

As husbands, we need to take our place as fathers to our children. God desires that we instruct our children to obey Him and do what is right before Him. As husbands, we must take our stand that as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord. There should be no compromise on this. Our hearts must be toward our children. When the hearts of the fathers turn toward their children, then the hearts of the children will turn toward their fathers. This positions us for the blessing of God.

The greenhouse—create an environment for all-round growth

Romans 14:17

for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

The greenhouse is a controlled and protected environment for plants to grow and thrive in. Similarly, our homes should be that controlled environment of Kingdom life and culture where we encourage all-round growth and development of our children. Create a Kingdom environment of love, faith, hope, righteousness, peace, and joy. Encourage your children to dream. Encourage them to explore, pursue interests, and develop their skills. Encourage development of their total person, spirit, soul, and body.

Recognize their inclinations, passions, and gifts

Psalm 139:14-17

**“I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made;
Marvelous are Your works,**

And that my soul knows very well.
¹⁵ My frame was not hidden from You,
When I was made in secret,
And skillfully wrought in the lowest parts of the earth.
¹⁶ Your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed.
And in Your book they all were written,
The days fashioned for me,
When as yet there were none of them.
¹⁷ How precious also are Your thoughts to me, O God!
How great is the sum of them!

God in His design of each child has deposited in them their inclinations, passions, and gifts. Encourage them to discover what they were designed for. Support them in their journey of discovery as they try out new things. They may succeed in some. They may get disappointed in others. But stand there beside them and guide them. Help them to learn and develop new skills. Give them what resources are appropriate and possible to nurture what God has placed in them.

Bring out the best in them

Psalm 112:1,2 (GNT)

¹Praise the LORD!
Happy is the person who honors the LORD,
who takes pleasure in obeying his commands.
²The good man's children will be powerful in the land;
his descendants will be blessed.

God has designed children to be powerful and to have impact and influence. Our role is to help develop our children, nurture them into their full potential, and help bring out the best in them.

- Speak positively to build their confidence.
- Commend them for their character and skill that they are developing. Commend them for things that they take initiative in.
- Teach them to make right choices and how to recognize wrong choices. Encourage them when they feel overwhelmed with their assignments and tasks.
- Engage with them when they ask for your advice. Help them think through the process. Even when they fail, stand by them, and speak faith and hope into their hearts.

Allocate time and room for conversation

Proverbs 31:1,2 (The Message)

¹The words of King Lemuel, the strong advice his mother gave him:
²“Oh, son of mine, what can you be thinking of! Child whom I bore! The son I dedicated to God!

Make time regularly, if possible, every weekday to talk with your children. This involves listening to them and sharing about anything they want to talk about. Listen attentively. Listening to them lets them know that we are really interested in them and what is happening in their lives. Inspire them. Speak wisdom into their lives. The words we lovingly sow into their lives will bear fruit later.

Use teachable moments

Proverbs 25:11 (The Message)

The right word at the right time is like a custom-made piece of jewelry

There are things that happen as part of life, which we can use to teach important lessons on living life or applying biblical truth. For instance, your child comes home and starts to talk to you about how she saw two children argue about something in school and how one child called the other child names, and the second child reacted, retaliated, and soon a hostile argument broke out. While she is narrating something that happened in school, after you've listened attentively, you can use this as a teachable moment to show your child what is the best way to handle a situation like this. "What would you do if someone called you names? What is the best way to handle this situation?" As you discuss this with her, you are imparting wisdom into her life and preparing her for the future.

Nurture faith in your children

Deuteronomy 4:9,10 (GNT)

⁹Be on your guard! Make certain that you do not forget, as long as you live, what you have seen with your own eyes. Tell your children and your grandchildren

¹⁰about the day you stood in the presence of the LORD your God at Mount Sinai, when he said to me, 'Assemble the people. I want them to hear what I have to say, so that they will learn to obey me as long as they live and so that they will teach their children to do the same.'

Deuteronomy 6:5-9 (GNT) (See also Deuteronomy 11:18-21)

⁵Love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.

⁶Never forget these commands that I am giving you today.

⁷Teach them to your children. Repeat them when you are at home and when you are away, when you are resting and when you are working.

⁸Tie them on your arms and wear them on your foreheads as a reminder.

⁹Write them on the doorposts of your houses and on your gates.

Psalm 78:1-7 (GNT)

**¹Listen, my people, to my teaching,
and pay attention to what I say.**

**²I am going to use wise sayings
and explain mysteries from the past,**

**³things we have heard and known,
things that our ancestors told us.**

**⁴We will not keep them from our children;
we will tell the next generation**

**about the LORD's power and his great deeds
and the wonderful things he has done.**

**⁵He gave laws to the people of Israel
and commandments to the descendants of Jacob.**

**He instructed our ancestors
to teach his laws to their children,**

**⁶so that the next generation might learn them
and in turn should tell their children.**

⁷In this way they also will put their trust in God

**and not forget what he has done,
but always obey his commandments.**

One of the responsibilities God has placed on parents is for us to teach our children and our grandchildren the Word, the ways, and the works of the Lord. He encourages us to do this as part of our daily life—when you come in, when you go out—speak the things of God. Instruct them in the Word of God. Help them to know the Lord and what He has done. Be intentional about it.

In addition to spontaneity where you speak God’s Word and talk about the Lord, whenever opportunity arises, you can also make use of our FREE APC books to teach your children. Encourage them to read these books. Study some of them along with your children. You can use our FREE books and teach them “*Who We Are In Christ*” and go through “*Foundations*” with them.

Teach them life skills

Proverbs 1:8,9 (GNT)

⁸My child, pay attention to what your father and mother tell you.

⁹Their teaching will improve your character as a handsome turban or a necklace improves your appearance.

What you teach your children can strengthen their character and position them for honor. One of the important things we need to do as parents is to teach them necessary life skills—skills they need to be successful in life regardless of the vocation they choose. Often, they may not learn these in school. Hence, it is important that we take time to nurture and impart these to our children at home.

While this is not a complete list of life skills, here are some important ones to consider.

<i>personal values</i>	<i>learning skills</i>	<i>anger management</i>	<i>stress management</i>	<i>time management</i>
<i>basic financial management</i>	<i>decision making</i>	<i>household management</i>	<i>grocery shopping</i>	<i>healthy habits</i>
<i>planning and organizing</i>	<i>teamwork</i>	<i>communication</i>	<i>effective listening skills</i>	<i>presentation skills</i>
<i>leadership skills</i>	<i>negotiations skills</i>	<i>conflict resolution skills</i>	<i>problem-solving skills</i>	

Get resources, books, or information online that can help you to do this. **Example:** *Life Skills for Kids: Equipping Your Child for the Real World* by Christine Field

Teach them about sex, purity, and marriage

Proverbs 6:20-24 (GNT)

²⁰Son, do what your father tells you and never forget what your mother taught you.

²¹Keep their words with you always, locked in your heart.

²²Their teaching will lead you when you travel, protect you at night, and advise you during the day.

²³Their instructions are a shining light; their correction can teach you how to live.

²⁴It can keep you away from bad women, from the seductive words of other men’s wives.

The best place for your children to learn about their sexuality, learn how to protect their sexual purity, and gain an understanding of marriage is from you. Teach them a biblical view on sex and the

importance of sexual purity. This is best done as you sit one on one with your child in their early teens and have a simple, non-threatening, loving conversation with him or her. Give them freedom to ask questions.

Here is a *sample talk* that you could use to speak to your son. Similarly, you can develop an outline on points you would need to speak to your daughter.

Physiological changes

- *Body starts producing male hormones (chemicals) that help develop your masculinity.*
- *Body starts producing semen—a fluid that contains sperms for reproduction.*
- *Some nights, this may be ejaculated by your body.*

Emotional changes

- *You will become aware of your own body's sexual development.*
- *You will become aware of feelings for the opposite sex. There is nothing wrong in recognizing that a girl is good looking. But stop with that. Guard your thoughts and emotions to not get into lust.*
- *Boys generally desire to have a “girlfriend” at this time, but this is too early. Their brain is yet to catch up with their body, and they are not able to make such decisions.*

Overcoming areas of sexual temptations

- ***Pornography:*** *This is ungodly. So, always stay away from this in all forms.*
- ***Fantasies:*** *Always keep your mind clean and pure. Refuse to fantasize evil.*
- ***Masturbation:*** *This is an unhealthy addiction. So, stay away from practicing this.*
- ***Girlfriend and dating:*** *It is better to wait till you have completed your studies and take up a job to consider finding the right person as your life partner. Till then, just be friends with boys and girls. Select your friends carefully. Be friends with those who will have a positive influence on your life. Stay away from friends who could influence you into wrong things.*
- ***Sex:*** *Sex outside of marriage is sin. So, stay away from this completely.*

Marriage

God designed sex to be enjoyed within a married life.

Protect your sexuality for your future wife.

When you are done with your studies and have settled into your job / career (say about 25 years), do these.

- *First, write down what you believe God wants you to do in life.*

- *Then, write down what kind of a wife you should have, who can be with you in the journey God has called you to make in life.*
- *Then, write down what you can bring into and contribute into the life of your future wife.*
- *Then, pray and ask God to provide the right person as your wife.*
- *Then, start looking around, meet people. When you find the right person, get to know the person. See if there is a match spiritually, emotionally, and physically.*
 - **Spiritually:** She must be a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ and be passionate about doing God's will. She must be mature in the faith and desiring to serve God with her talents.
 - **Emotionally:** She must be able to relate to you intellectually and emotionally at your level.
 - **Physically:** She should be someone you like and are attracted to.
 - There should be common interests you share.
 - Get to know the person well, before making a decision. Do not make a decision just based on outward looks and achievements. Try to know the person's temperament and character. Watch the person act / react in different real-life situations, how she handles pressure, how she takes on responsibilities. Is she responsible? Is she neat / tidy? Does she speak kindly—always? Remember, you are going to live with this person the rest of your life.
- *When you are considering someone, let dad and mum know so they can also pray and help with this decision. Also, discuss this with the girl's parents to get their approval. Also, share this with your pastor to seek his guidance.*
- *At the right time, get married.*

Encourage, inspire, and support them into their life's call

Acts 13:36

"For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell asleep, was buried with his fathers, and saw corruption;

Encourage your children to pursue what is best for their lives and what they have been designed to do. Do not attempt to mold them into something you want for them but what they may not be best suited for. As their goals begin to become clearer and they make decisions about their career and profession, continue to encourage, support, and guide them. They will go through transitions, make changes, and explore different opportunities. Journey with them through this. Be supportive and bring godly counsel and wisdom to bear at the right moments. Ultimately, we desire for them to serve the purposes of God in their generation.

Leave a spiritual legacy

Isaiah 59:21

"As for Me," says the LORD, "this is My covenant with them: My Spirit who is upon you, and My words which I have put in your mouth, shall not depart from your mouth, nor from the mouth of your descendants, nor from the mouth of your descendants' descendants," says the LORD, "from this time and forevermore."

We are called to pass on the faith, the Word, and the Spirit to the next and succeeding generations. Continue to do this as you keep praying for them and over their lives. Through prayer and in the spirit, release the Word and the anointing over their lives. Continue in simple, gentle ways to impart and inspire them in the things of God.

Let Go! And let God!

1 Samuel 1:26-28 (GNT)

²⁶ Hannah said to him, “Excuse me, sir. Do you remember me? I am the woman you saw standing here, praying to the LORD.”

²⁷ I asked him for this child, and he gave me what I asked for.

²⁸ So I am dedicating him to the LORD. As long as he lives, he will belong to the LORD.”

Then they worshiped the LORD there.

1 Samuel 2:11,12 (GNT)

¹¹ Then Elkanah went back home to Ramah, but the boy Samuel stayed in Shiloh and served the LORD under the priest Eli.

¹² The sons of Eli were scoundrels. They paid no attention to the LORD

1 Samuel 2:17-19 (GNT)

¹⁷ This sin of the sons of Eli was extremely serious in the LORD’s sight, because they treated the offerings to the LORD with such disrespect.

¹⁸ In the meantime the boy Samuel continued to serve the LORD, wearing a sacred linen apron.

¹⁹ Each year his mother would make a little robe and take it to him when she accompanied her husband to offer the yearly sacrifice.

Hannah had prayed earnestly for a son and received a baby boy whom she called Samuel and dedicated him to the Lord’s service. At the right time, Hannah came along with her husband Elkanah and left young Samuel under the care of the priest Eli. However, things at the Temple were not particularly good. Even though Samuel had been dedicated to the Lord and in the Temple, he was in a bad environment because of the sons of Eli. The sins that were being committed by Eli’s own sons around the Temple were well known. Although the Scripture does not record this, we can safely assume that Hannah being the woman of prayer that she was, she would have, through her prayer, preserved Samuel and prayed him into his call and destiny. Nothing, not even the hostile environment and influence could stop this.

There will come a time when we will have to let go of our children as they step out of the home and move out to make their journey in the world. We let go and let God take charge. We still cover and undergird our children through our fervent prayers.

As you release and let your children transition into the next phase of life, speak forgiveness over your children for anything they may have said or done that hurt you. Do not hold on to any hurt or ill-feeling toward your children.

Ask for forgiveness for anything you may have said or done that hurt them. They must not leave home with hurt, bitterness, resentment, and anger in their hearts.

Release healing for any hurtful or negative things they may have endured at home growing up. Cancel negative things you may have spoken over their lives and future. Release them with the blessing of God over their lives.

APPLICATION

In the light of what we have covered in this chapter, reflect on the following:

If you have children, in the light of what was presented in this chapter, discuss together areas that you need to specifically work on to nurture your children. Draw up a plan on how you can intentionally work on specific areas to nurture your children in the things of God. If you do not have children yet but plan to have children soon, discuss this looking ahead into time.

TURNING POINT

Pray over the following for your own life.

Pray together as husband and wife (or fiancé) for God's wisdom and grace to fulfill your calling as parents and to nurture the children God has entrusted to you, and to bring out the best in them so that they can bring glory and honor to the Lord.

ACTION ITEM

Read a good book on how to bring out the best in your children. **Example:** "*Bringing Out the Best in Your Child*" by Cynthia Ulrich Tobias

16

THE FAMILY ALTAR AND INTERCESSION

God has called us as parents to nurture our children in the faith. Part of this involves teaching them the Word of God, nurturing them in the work of the Holy Spirit, helping them become part of a local church community, and showing them how to engage in the work of God's Kingdom. Nurturing your family in the faith requires being intentional and consistent. You must have a burning desire to see your family grow in God. You must also learn to engage in prayer for your family because more battles are won in prayer than by other means. This chapter addresses these two important areas of having a family altar and how to pray for your family.

Simple suggestions on having a family altar

The term "family altar" simply means having a time where you and your spouse, together with your children, take time to worship, pray, and hear the Word of God. It could be any time of day that is convenient to all of you. As far as possible, keep this time regularly and possibly five to six days of the week at least. If you have children, keep this time meaningful and relevant to the children as well. Keep this time spontaneous and flexible. Some days you may just spend time singing and worshipping. Some days you may do everything—Bible reading, prayer, and worship. You can read from the Scripture or use a daily devotional, whichever you find useful for your family. As your children grow up, permit time for discussion, conversation, and asking and answering questions around the Word of God. Encourage participation from your children. Take time to pray for specific needs.

Even if your spouse or children have not yet made a personal commitment to Jesus Christ, invite them to join in this time of prayer. Keep it simple, welcoming, and meaningful.

Standing in the gap—praying for your family

Luke 22:31,32

³¹And the Lord said, “Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat.

³²But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren.”

One of the most important things we can do is to stand in the gap, that is, pray for and on behalf of our family members. We understand that God has a plan and purpose for each of them and we need to pray for them to fulfill God's purpose and destiny for their lives. We also understand that there are times they may face adverse circumstances and they need the strength, wisdom, and empowering of God over their lives. We need to pray this for them. We also understand that there may be times their faith may be weak; they may go astray and we need to pray for them to be restored and to return to walking with the Lord. We also understand that there is an enemy that will try his schemes and ways against them to hinder them, discourage them, to distract them, and so on. We need to pray for God's

protection and strength over the lives of our family members and engage and thwart the schemes of the enemy using our God-given authority.

Praying for your spouse

Here are some things you can do as you engage in prayer for your spouse. We present this as though it were a husband praying for his wife. The same can be done when a wife prays for her husband.

- 1) Pray for her spiritual growth (Ephesians 1:15-21; Ephesians 3:14-21; Colossians 1:9-11).
- 2) Pray for her growth in God's purposes for her life—that she will grow in her gifts, calling, and anointing; that she will walk in and fulfill every good thing God has ordained for her life.
- 3) Declare what God's Word says over her. Declare that your wife is a wise woman and she builds up your home (Proverbs 14:1); that she is a prudent woman and she is your pride and joy (Proverbs 19:14; Proverbs 12:4); that she is like a fruitful vine in your home bringing blessing, joy, and protection to the family (Psalm 128:3); that she is a virtuous woman and her price is far more than rubies, she is blessed in all that she does, your heart safely trusts in her, your children arise and call her blessed, she opens her mouth with wisdom and in her tongue is gentleness, her own work brings her honor and respect in the city (Proverbs 31:10-31).
- 4) Declare wisdom, success, and blessing over her work and ministry—that she walks in the wisdom of God in the decisions she makes; that all the works of her hands are blessed; that she prospers in all that she does.

Praying over your children

Here is a suggested format to pray for your children.

- 1) Pray for their spiritual growth (Ephesians 1:15-21; Ephesians 3:14-21; Colossians 1:9-11).
- 2) Pray for their growth in God's purpose for their lives—that they will grow in the gifts, calling, and anointing of God; that they will walk in and fulfill every good thing God has ordained for their lives.
- 3) Pray and declare the Word of God and promises in His Word over their lives (some of these promises are listed in a section below).
- 4) Declare and call forth their prophetic destiny and their calling based on what God is revealing to you about them.
- 5) Sanctify, consecrate, and bless all the gifts, skills, capabilities, knowledge that God has blessed them with to be used for God's glory and for the purposes of the Kingdom of God.
- 6) Bless their present.
 - Spiritual life and growth, growth in character, their love for God's Word
 - Health and safety

- Academics, learning, wisdom
- Friends, choices, decisions, for wisdom and discernment
- Character, godly lifestyle, no compromise

7) Bless their future.

- Career and profession and journey into their life's purpose
- Favor, open doors, opportunities, provision
- Success, making an impact, being fruitful
- Future spouse, family, and children
- Serving God and ministry

8) Bind, destroy and annul any of satan's schemes against their lives.

Praying for their salvation and deliverance from waywardness

In case your spouse or children are not yet saved and have not made a personal commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ, here are some things you can do to pray for them and contend for their salvation. Remember to give them the time they need to come to the point of decision in their lives. Don't try to take the place of the Holy Spirit and try to condemn them or threaten them. Simply love them and show them the love of Christ. Engage fervently in prayer for however long it may take. Sometimes, for a period, they may go from bad to worse, become disinterested in the things of God, become wayward, and rebellious. But continue strong in prayer. Never give up praying for them. God is on our side and with the weapons He has given us, we will win. Remember His promise, "*But thus says the LORD: "Even the captives of the mighty shall be taken away, And the prey of the terrible be delivered; For I will contend with him who contends with you, And I will save your children"*" (Isaiah 49:25).

- 1) Bind and cast down every spirit of this world, deception, lies of atheism, existentialism, humanism, false religion, etc. that blinds their minds. Declare that the light of the Gospel shines into their hearts and minds bringing the knowledge of God and His Son Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 4:4,6).
- 2) Cast down every stronghold, argument, reasoning, imagination that contradicts the truth of God's Word and bring every thought captive to Christ (2 Corinthians 10:4,5).
- 3) Invite the Holy Spirit to bring about conviction of sin, righteousness, and judgment (John 16:7-11).
- 4) Ask God to draw them to Him (John 6:44; John 12:32).
- 5) Pray that God will move upon them bringing them to repentance and to the knowledge of the truth and that they will come to their senses and escape the trap of the evil one (2 Timothy 2:25,26).
- 6) Ask God to grant them the Spirit of wisdom and revelation so that their spiritual eyes are enlightened to know the Lord, to know the beauty of His Word, to know the purpose of His calling, to know the greatness of His power (Ephesians 1:15-21; Psalm 119:18).

Similarly, you can take a hold of God's Word in prayer and declaration for other areas of their lives, for example, safety and preservation if they are engaged in a profession where their life is exposed to harm and danger, etc.

Promises to pray and declare over your home

Here are Scriptures that you can use to pray and declare over your home. You can add to this list.

Psalm 118:15

**The voice of rejoicing and salvation
Is in the tents of the righteous;
The right hand of the LORD does valiantly.**

Psalm 128:1-6 (GNT)

**¹Happy are those who obey the LORD,
who live by his commands.
²Your work will provide for your needs;
you will be happy and prosperous.
³Your wife will be like a fruitful vine in your home,
and your children will be like young olive trees around your table.
⁴A man who obeys the LORD
will surely be blessed like this.
⁵May the LORD bless you from Zion!
May you see Jerusalem prosper
all the days of your life!
⁶May you live to see your grandchildren!
Peace be with Israel!**

Proverbs 12:7

... But the house of the righteous will stand.

Proverbs 14:11

... But the tent of the upright will flourish.

Proverbs 15:6

In the house of the righteous *there is* much treasure,...

Isaiah 32:18,19

**¹⁸My people will dwell in a peaceful habitation,
In secure dwellings, and in quiet resting places,
¹⁹Though hail comes down on the forest,
And the city is brought low in humiliation.**

Promises to pray and declare over your children

Here are Scriptures that you can use to pray and declare over your children. You can add to this list.

Psalm 37:25,26 (GNT)

**²⁵I am old now; I have lived a long time,
but I have never seen good people abandoned by the LORD
or their children begging for food.**

²⁶At all times they give freely and lend to others,
and their children are a blessing.

Psalm 112:1-3 (GNT)

¹Praise the LORD!

Happy is the person who honors the LORD,
who takes pleasure in obeying his commands.
²The good man's children will be powerful in the land;
his descendants will be blessed.
³His family will be wealthy and rich,
and he will be prosperous forever.

Psalm 127:1-5

¹Unless the LORD builds the house,
They labor in vain who build it;
Unless the LORD guards the city,
The watchman stays awake in vain.
²It is vain for you to rise up early,
To sit up late,
To eat the bread of sorrows;
For so He gives His beloved sleep.
³Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD,
The fruit of the womb is a reward.
⁴Like arrows in the hand of a warrior,
So are the children of one's youth.
⁵Happy is the man who has his quiver full of them;
They shall not be ashamed,
But shall speak with their enemies in the gate.

Isaiah 8:18

Here am I and the children whom the LORD has given me!
We are for signs and wonders in Israel
From the LORD of hosts,
Who dwells in Mount Zion.

Isaiah 44:3,4

³For I will pour water on him who is thirsty,
And floods on the dry ground;
I will pour My Spirit on your descendants,
And My blessing on your offspring;
⁴They will spring up among the grass
Like willows by the watercourses.'

Isaiah 49:25

But thus says the LORD:

“Even the captives of the mighty shall be taken away,
And the prey of the terrible be delivered;
For I will contend with him who contends with you,
And I will save your children.

Isaiah 54:13

All your children *shall be taught by the LORD,*
And great *shall be the peace of your children.*

Isaiah 59:21

“As for Me,” says the LORD, “this *is* My covenant with them: My Spirit who *is* upon you, and My words which I have put in your mouth, shall not depart from your mouth, nor from the mouth of your descendants, nor from the mouth of your descendants’ descendants,” says the LORD, “from this time and forevermore.”

APPLICATION

In the light of what we have covered in this chapter, reflect on the following:

Commit to praying regularly for your spouse and children. Make a short prayer list of specific things you will pray for your spouse and for your children.

TURNING POINT

Pray over the following for your own life.

Ask the Lord to place in your heart a passion to pray for your family and give you the grace to do this regularly.

ACTION ITEM

If you are not doing so already, start getting your family together for a time of prayer and reading the Word. Establish your family altar.



17

THE FAMILY, THE CHURCH, AND THE KINGDOM

A very important part of nurturing your family is helping develop an understanding of the local church community and the importance of being part of and serving in the local church. Further, we also need to nurture our family in understanding the Kingdom of God and seeking to further the Kingdom of God through whatever each is doing in life.

Be a committed part of a good Bible-believing, Christ-centered, Spirit-filled local church community. Be planted in the house of the Lord. Don't keep wandering from church to church unless there is a genuine need to do so. Constantly moving from church to church will make it difficult for the children as well. You grow when you are planted.

Establish the practice of being in church every Sunday

Hebrews 10:24, 25 (GNT)

²⁴Let us be concerned for one another, to help one another to show love and to do good.

²⁵Let us not give up the habit of meeting together, as some are doing. Instead, let us encourage one another all the more, since you see that the Day of the Lord is coming nearer.

We know that the Early Church met regularly, and as new congregations were established, it became a practice to meet on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:2). Establish the practice in your family to get together with other believers for worship, prayer, listening to God's Word, and fellowship on the first day of the week. Make this the norm. While it is true that there may be the occasional Sunday that you miss, it should be understood in the family that the norm is to meet with the local church community every Sunday. Sometimes, this may be a challenge in some work settings where people are required to be at work on Sundays. You will have to ensure that you do have the freedom at your workplace to be together with your family at church on whichever day of the week the local church meets.

Belonging to the family of God

1 Timothy 3:15 (GNT)

But if I delay, this letter will let you know how we should conduct ourselves in God's household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth.

The local church is more than just a place where we attend services on Sunday. The local church is "God's household," that is, God's family. We need to nurture the understanding with our own personal families that we belong to the local church family, which is the family of God. As part of belonging to the family of God, we develop meaningful relationships with other people of God where we love, care, support, bless, and encourage one another.

Serving in church

1 Peter 4:10,11

¹⁰ As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.

¹¹ If anyone speaks, *let him speak* as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, *let him do it* as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.

The local church is also a place where each of us brings the gifts, talents, time, and abilities that God has given us to contribute in one or more ways to serve one another. We do this not to put ourselves on display, but rather to serve others and to glorify God. Encourage each family member to engage in the local church and to serve with their time, efforts, and skills toward the work and ministry of the local church.

The older mentoring the younger

Titus 2:3,4 (GNT)

³ In the same way instruct the older women to behave as women should who live a holy life. They must not be slanderers or slaves to wine. They must teach what is good,

⁴ in order to train the younger women to love their husbands and children,

One of the important things about living out our belonging to a local church family is to engage in the nurturing of younger people. In Titus, Paul gives instruction for older women to train and nurture younger women concerning practical things about the home and family. We can safely infer a similar practice for older men to engage with younger men in matters concerning practical living. The apostle Paul encouraged Timothy to live a life of example, something that models to other believers what it is to live as a child of God.

1 Timothy 4:12 (GNT)

Do not let anyone look down on you because you are young, but be an example for the believers in your speech, your conduct, your love, faith, and purity.

So, part of being a family (husband, wife, children) that is part of a larger church family is to look at ways that we can nurture others and be nurtured by others. We need to give ourselves to this kind of loving community.

Life groups

Acts 2:46

So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart

Acts 5:42

And daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.

Life groups are essentially small groups that meet at homes or other convenient locations to build relationships, have spiritual fellowship, and grow together as disciples of Jesus Christ. The life group is important because this is where meaningful relationships can develop and discipleship can happen. Hence, one way of having your personal family connect meaningfully to a local church family is to be

part of a life group during the week. As we see in the book of Acts, the believers not only gathered in the large gatherings in the temple, but also at homes where they ate, worshipped, heard the Word, and prayed together.

Missions

Every believer is called to engage in missions. By missions, we simply mean engaging in some meaningful way to fulfill the commission the Lord gave to go make disciples of all nations. This involves winning the lost and discipling them in faith in Christ. As parents, we need to develop this commitment to missions (or being missional) in our children. One good way to do this is to take our children along in church outreaches, whether in the city or to other places on mission trips so that they get to be involved either in winning lost souls, discipling believers, or assisting others who are doing this. As children see our personal involvement and commitment to sharing the Gospel wherever and whenever, they too will catch the zeal and passion to do the same.

Generosity, kindness, and tithing

2 Corinthians 9:6-8

“But this I say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.

⁷ So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver.

⁸ And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work.

Another important practice that we need to develop and nurture in our children is that of generosity, doing good to others as well as tithing into the local church. We need to teach them what the Scriptures instruct us about this as well as show them by example, how to do good, how to help others in need, and how to give a tenth of our income to the work of God’s Kingdom.

One way of teaching children to tithe is to help them with a monthly allowance or even earn some money each month. Then encourage them to calculate 10% of the income and give the tithe in the Sunday offering. This way they learn early in life what tithe is and the importance of tithing.

Developing a Kingdom mindset, being Kingdom focused

Matthew 6:33

But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.

Through our own lives, we need to communicate to our children the importance of seeking the establishment of God’s Kingdom in and through all we do. Challenge them through your life, your choices, and through your prayer to use everything you are entrusted with for the purposes of God’s Kingdom, to see His rule and dominion established in the hearts and lives of people.

APPLICATION

In the light of what we have covered in this chapter, reflect on the following:

Discuss with your spouse areas where you would need to nurture your family in commitment and fellowship with your local church, serving in church, engaging in missions, and serving the purposes of God's Kingdom.

TURNING POINT

Pray over the following for your own life.

Pray and ask the Lord to give you wisdom to help guide your family into being a vital part of your local church, serving in the work and ministry of the local church, and the purpose of God's Kingdom.

ACTION ITEM

Find out ways in which each family member can engage in your local church. Start serving. If possible, as a family, take part in at least one mission trip or outreach work in the next 12 months.

18

WHEN CHILDREN BECOME YOUR FRIENDS

Relating to children as adults

Deuteronomy 32:11,12 (The Message)

¹¹ He was like an eagle hovering over its nest, overshadowing its young, Then spreading its wings, lifting them into the air, teaching them to fly.

¹² God alone led him; there was not a foreign god in sight.

As time goes by, children grow up past their teenage years, and mature into young adults. At some point, they will leave home, either for college or upon their marriage. While our work of nurturing and caring may well be over, we will learn to relate to them as adults and as friends. At some point, the young eagle must be released out of the nest and taught to fly on its own.

Once you let them out of the nest, let them learn to fly on their own. We must learn not to interfere in their lives and their family. Of course, be there to help them or advise them if they need it. But interfering in their lives will do more harm than good.

Do not keep making decisions for them. Let them make their own.

Drawing out of old and new wells

Genesis 26:18-23, 32, 33

¹⁸ And Isaac dug again the wells of water which they had dug in the days of Abraham his father, for the Philistines had stopped them up after the death of Abraham. He called them by the names which his father had called them.

¹⁹ Also Isaac's servants dug in the valley, and found a well of running water there.

²⁰ But the herdsmen of Gerar quarreled with Isaac's herdsmen, saying, "The water is ours." So he called the name of the well Esek, because they quarreled with him.

²¹ Then they dug another well, and they quarreled over that one also. So he called its name Sitnah.

²² And he moved from there and dug another well, and they did not quarrel over it. So he called its name Rehoboth, because he said, "For now the LORD has made room for us, and we shall be fruitful in the land."

²³ Then he went up from there to Beersheba.

³² It came to pass the same day that Isaac's servants came and told him about the well which they had dug, and said to him, "We have found water."

³³ So he called it Shebah. Therefore the name of the city is Beersheba to this day.

This passage brings out some interesting happenings in Isaac's life. Isaac, as he went about his life, did reopen some of the old wells his father Abraham had dug. But then he also dug some new wells and found water. He had to face some challenges, but he continued to dig new wells and continued to move into a place where he had room to grow until he established himself in Beersheba. Similarly, while our children may enjoy some of the blessings (spiritual and natural) of wells that we have dug, we must encourage them to dig their own wells, press past opposition, and arrive at the place where they can be established.

Having their own encounter, building their own altar

Genesis 26:24,25

²⁴That night the LORD appeared to him and said, “I am the God of your father Abraham. Do not be afraid; I am with you. I will bless you and give you many descendants because of my promise to my servant Abraham.”

²⁵Isaac built an altar there and worshiped the LORD. Then he set up his camp there, and his servants dug another well.

Through this process of digging of his own wells, Isaac had his own personal encounter with God and built his own altar to the Lord. He was no longer depending on his father's encounter or his father's altar. Isaac now had his own personal experience with God and had learned to have his own altar of worship. This is the best thing that can happen as our children navigate into adulthood and seek to establish themselves. They need to make their own spiritual journey with the Lord, have their own personal encounters, and come to a place of their own personal intimacy and knowledge of the Lord.

Imparting faith and wisdom to your grandchildren

Isaiah 59:21

“As for Me,” says the LORD, “this is My covenant with them: My Spirit who is upon you, and My words which I have put in your mouth, shall not depart from your mouth, nor from the mouth of your descendants, nor from the mouth of your descendants’ descendants,” says the LORD, “from this time and forevermore.”

2 Timothy 1:5

when I call to remembrance the genuine faith that is in you, which dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and I am persuaded is in you also.

As grandchildren come along, one of the best things we can do is to be around to impart wisdom and the knowledge of the Lord into their lives. God desires that revelation and anointing be passed on to our children's children. So, in ways that do not interfere with what parents are doing, we serve to impart the faith, wisdom, learning, and experience into the lives of our children's children.

APPLICATION

In the light of what we have covered in this chapter, reflect on the following:

- 1) What are some “old wells” God has placed in your family? How can you ensure that they continue springing up and blessing your children?

- 2) What are some of the “new wells” that your children might be able to dig—spiritually and professionally—in their lives? How can you encourage them in their journey into this?

TURNING POINT

Pray over the following for your own life.

- 1) Pray and ask God for the wisdom you need to relate to your children as adults. Also, see areas where they can break new ground in their lives for the advancement of God's Kingdom.
- 2) Pray also for your children to have their encounter, build their own altar, and receive their own promise from God for their lives.

ACTION ITEM

Think of something that captures what God has done in your life which you can pass on as a memorial to your children as a reminder of the goodness of God. Work on it at the right time, sometime in the future.



19

ENJOYING THE REST OF THE JOURNEY

With an empty nest, children grown up, and gone, it is once again just the two of you—you (husband) and the wife of your youth. Only this time, you are on the other side of parenting. The years have only brought you closer to each other. You have hopefully grown to know, understand, appreciate, and work with each other so much better. It is time to enjoy the rest of the journey—just the two of you!

Let go of regrets, overcome life's challenges

Psalm 84:5-7

*⁵Blessed is the man whose strength is in You,
Whose heart is set on pilgrimage.
⁶As they pass through the Valley of Baca,
They make it a spring;
The rain also covers it with pools.
⁷They go from strength to strength;
Each one appears before God in Zion.*

Our strength comes from the Lord and our heart is set on pilgrimage. We are pilgrims pressing toward our destination. As we pass through the valley of weeping, we make it a spring. This is what we are called to do. Make your valley of Baca, the dry and mournful place, a place of rejoicing and celebration. How do you make a valley of weeping, a place of rejoicing? Simply by choosing to rejoice, to praise, celebrate God, and announce the promise of God. In the wilderness, where God provided a spring of water, “*Israel sang this song: “Spring up, O well! All of you sing to it”* (Numbers 21:17).

Let go of things that cause you to weep. Let go of past regrets, mistakes, and things where you may have failed. Overcome challenges that life may bring.

God is faithful to send the rain that covers the dry and barren land and makes pools of water. As we make our pilgrimage, we go from strength to strength.

Enjoy memories, but don't live in the past

Psalm 77:11

**I will remember the works of the LORD;
Surely I will remember Your wonders of old.**

Psalm 105:5

**Remember His marvelous works which He has done,
His wonders, and the judgments of His mouth,**

Psalm 143:5

I remember the days of old;

**I meditate on all Your works;
I muse on the work of Your hands.**

It is always good to remember and enjoy the memories of the past, all the wonderful things the Lord has done and His faithfulness through various seasons of life. However, we must make the most of the time we have now and in the coming days and use them to maximize impact for the Kingdom of God.

Stay healthy, stay strong, keep stimulated, maintain vitality

Psalm 103:5

**Who satisfies your mouth with good *things*,
So that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.**

Psalm 92:12-14 (GNT)

¹² The righteous will flourish like palm trees;
they will grow like the cedars of Lebanon.
¹³ They are like trees planted in the house of the LORD,
that flourish in the Temple of our God,
¹⁴ that still bear fruit in old age
and are always green and strong.

One of the benefits of God given to us in Psalm 103 is that our youth will be renewed like the eagle's. God's Word promises the ability to bear fruit even in old age and the blessing of remaining "green and strong" or fresh and flourishing. Of course, we must do our part in walking in this blessing of God. But it is ours, and we should walk in it so that we can be useful for God and for the purposes of His Kingdom.

Testifying to generations to come

Psalm 71:17,18 (GNT)

¹⁷ You have taught me ever since I was young,
and I still tell of your wonderful acts.
¹⁸ Now that I am old and my hair is gray,
do not abandon me, O God!
Be with me while I proclaim your power and might
to all generations to come.

Continue to do what God has called you to do. Continue to proclaim Him, His power, and His works to generations to come.

Whether together or alone, run the race to the finish

2 Corinthians 4:16-18

¹⁶ Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward *man* is being renewed day by day.
¹⁷ For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory,
¹⁸ while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen *are* temporary, but the things which are not seen *are* eternal.

We do not know what lies ahead. We do not know when our race on earth will be over. We do not know if there are years that we will have to run the race alone, without our spouse. Whether together or alone, each must run the race to finish knowing that there is an eternal glory that awaits us. On this earth, though our outward man ages, yet we are renewed in our inner man by His Holy Spirit. There is a freshness in our inner person.

We will each have to fight a good fight, finish the course assigned to us, and keep the faith until the very end.

2 Timothy 4:7,8

⁷I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.

⁸Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the LORD, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.



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Recommended Reading

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DO YOU KNOW THE GOD WHO LOVES YOU?

About 2000 years ago, God came into this world as a man. His name is Jesus. He lived a perfectly sinless life. Since Jesus was God in flesh, everything He said and did revealed God to us. The words He spoke were the very words of God. The things He did were the actions of God. Jesus did many miracles on the earth. He healed the sick and suffering. He opened blind eyes, unstopped deaf ears, made the lame to walk and healed every kind of sickness and disease. He fed the hungry by miraculously multiplying a few loaves of bread, calmed the storm and did many other wonderful things.

All these actions reveal to us that God is a good God who wants people to be well, whole, healthy, and happy. God wants to meet the needs of people.

So why then would God decide to become a man and step into our world? Why did Jesus come?

All of us have sinned and done things that are unacceptable before the God who created us. Sin has its consequences. Sin is like a great unsurpassable wall between God and us. Sin separates us from God. It prevents us from knowing and having a meaningful relationship with the One who created us. Therefore, many of us try to fill this void with other things.

Another consequence of our sins is eternal separation from God. In God's court, the penalty for sin is death. Death is eternal separation from God in hell.

But the good news is that we can be free from sin and be restored to God. The Bible says, "*For the wages [payment] of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord*" (**Romans 6:23**). Jesus paid for the sins of the whole world when He died on the cross. Then, three days later He rose again, showed Himself alive to many and then went back into heaven.

God is a God of love and mercy. He does not wish that any person be lost in hell. And so, He came to provide a way for the entire human race to be free from sin and its lasting consequences. He came to save sinners—to rescue people like you and me from sin and eternal death.

To receive this free forgiveness of sins, the Bible tells us that we have to do just one thing—accept what the Lord Jesus Christ did on the cross and to believe in Him wholeheartedly.

“... through His name, whoever believes in Him will receive forgiveness of sins” (Acts 10:43).

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

You too can receive forgiveness and cleansing for your sins if you will believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

The following is a simple prayer to help you decide to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and what He has done for you on the cross. This prayer will help you express your acceptance of what Jesus has done for you and receive forgiveness and cleansing for your sins. This prayer is only a guideline. You can also pray in your own words.

Dear Lord Jesus, today, I have understood what You did for me on the cross. You died for me, you shed Your precious blood and paid the penalty for my sins so that I could be forgiven. The Bible tells me that whoever believes in You will receive forgiveness for their sins.

Today, I decide to believe in You and to accept what You did for me by dying for me on the cross and rising again from the dead. I know I cannot save myself by my own good works, and neither can any other human save me. I cannot earn forgiveness for my sins.

Today, I believe in my heart and say with my mouth that You died for me, You paid the penalty for my sins, You rose again from the dead, and by faith in You, I receive forgiveness and cleansing for my sins.

Thank You, Jesus. Help me to love You, to know You more and to be faithful to You.

Amen.

ABOUT ALL PEOPLES CHURCH

Our vision at All Peoples Church (APC) is to be salt and light in the city of Bangalore, a voice to the nation and to the nations.

All Peoples Church is a **Jesus loving, Word focused, Spirit filled**, family church, an equipping center, a missions base and a world outreach.

- As a **family church**, we grow together as a community in Christ-centered fellowship, caring and serving each other in love as the assembly of God.
- As an **equipping center**, we empower and equip every believer to live victoriously, mature into Christlikeness and fulfill God's purposes for their lives.
- As a **missions base**, we engage in meaningful ministry to bless our city, nation and the nations with the full Gospel of Jesus Christ through the Word of God and supernatural demonstrations of the power of the Holy Spirit.
- As a **world outreach**, we serve locally and globally by nurturing godly leaders and Spirit-filled churches who can impact their regions for the Kingdom of God.

At APC, we are committed to presenting the complete, uncompromised Word of God in the anointing and demonstration of His Holy Spirit. We believe that good music, creative presentations, brilliant apologetics, contemporary ministry techniques, the latest technology and so on, can never substitute the God-ordained approach of proclaiming the Word in the power of the Holy Spirit with signs, wonders, miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:4,5; Hebrews 2:3,4). Our theme is Jesus, our content is the Word, our method is the Holy Spirit's power, our passion is people and our goal is Christ-like maturity.

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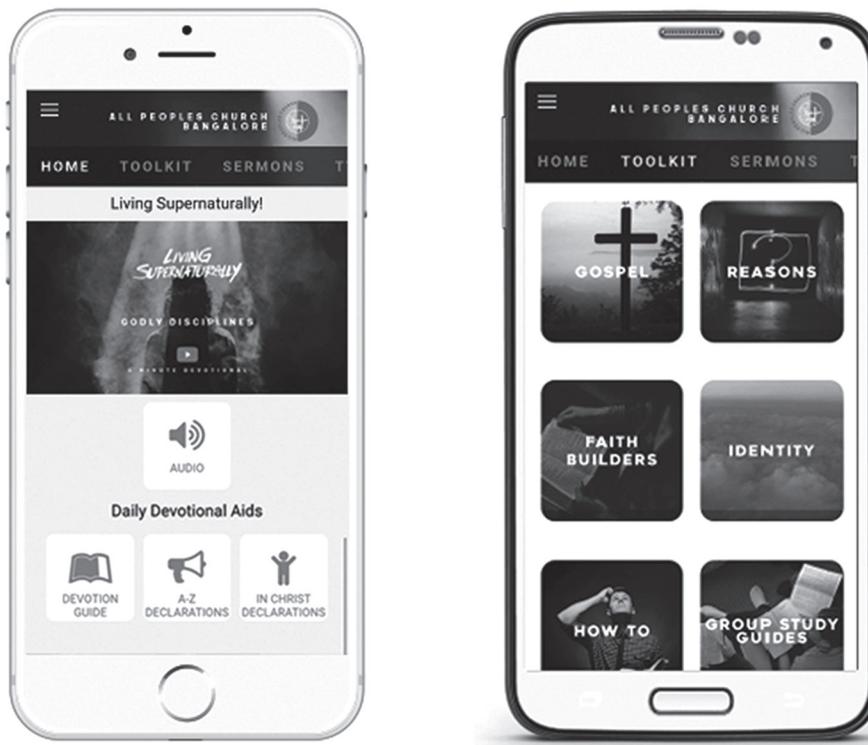
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Marriage and family were designed and instituted by God. They were intended to be a blessing. To build good marriages and strong families, we need to rediscover God's instruction and teaching on how to do this correctly. In compiling this manual, we have attempted to bring together Scriptural teaching and the practical application of truth on the topic of marriage and family.

For those starting their journey, we trust that this resource will be a blessing to you and your spouse (or fiancé) to help you lay a foundation for many happy years together. If you have already been married for some time now, we trust that this resource will help you rediscover purpose and rekindle passion so that both you and your spouse, together can enjoy marriage to the full as God designed it to be.

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