

Hope for Marriage

FRAN GEIGER JOSLIN



AUTHENTICITY
BOOK HOUSE

Hope for Marriage

Copyright © 2025 by Fran Geiger Joslin

Contributing Editors: Erin Ensinger, K. Howard Joslin

Volunteer Editor: Kris Dain

ISBN (4 x 6 English paperback): 978-1-958127-14-8

ISBN (English eBook): 978-1-958127-15-5

Authenticity Book House

c/o 705 W. Filmore St.

Winterset, IA 50273 USA

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be duplicated, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or any other—except for brief quotations in printed reviews, without the prior permission of the publisher.

Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used with permission. All rights reserved.

Because of the dynamic nature of the Internet, any web addresses or links contained in this book may have changed since publication and may no longer be valid.

Cover design: Jessica Helm, Chris Schechner

Interior design: Chris Schechner



AUTHENTICITY
BOOK HOUSE

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Published by Authenticity Book House

Printed in the United States of America

The Ministry of Authenticity Book House

Authenticity Book House (ABH) publishes **Simplified Biblical Training in Bite-Sized Books**. We supply theologically sound books to pastors and others who have little or no access to formal in-depth Bible training. ABH simplifies content to reach an appropriate reading level without watering down major truths needed for spiritual growth and leadership. The small size of our books allows easy transport and more affordable publication. Since they often journey beyond their initial drop points, we include a clear gospel message in each manuscript, spreading the good news as far as a book may travel. Our team approach to publishing includes qualified theologians, professional editors and writers, highly qualified translators, and cultural consultants. ABH strategically plans a full curriculum for educating pastors and church leaders. We also publish materials to help supplement their ministry to new believers and those in their churches who suffer hardship.

ABH offers bite-sized books to audiences in multiple languages. To learn more about ABH, how to access our books, or how to translate for us, visit www.abhbooks.com.

Acknowledgements

Special thanks to our heavenly Father who entrusted me with marriage—twice. Thank you, Brian, (my first husband), for loving me intensely as I am, for believing in me, and for keeping me laughing. Thank you, Howard (my current husband), for encouraging me to step into the role God directed for me and believing that I could do it. Thank you for working through our marriage problems, not giving up on us, taking responsibility where needed, and keeping me laughing.

Without the love of God, these two men, and the Bible I would not understand or experience God's design for marriage.

Table of Contents

Introduction

Chapter One: Rule as Equals

(Genesis 1:1, 24-31)

Chapter Two: Receive God's Gift

(Genesis 2:18-23)

Chapter Three: Become One

(John 17:19-23; Genesis 2:24-25)

Chapter Four: Avoid Rebelling Against God

(Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7)

Chapter Five: Avoid Blame

(Genesis 3:8-19)

Chapter Six: Forgive Each Other

(Matthew 18:21-35)

Chapter Seven: Rely on the Spirit's Power

(Galatians 5:13-23)

Chapter Eight: Submit to Authorities

(Romans 13:1-7)

Chapter Nine: Submit to Each Other

(Ephesians 5:1-2, 15-21)

Chapter Ten: Submit to Your Husband

Hope for Marriage

(Ephesians 5:21-24)

Chapter Eleven: Love Your Wife

(Ephesians 5:25-31)

Chapter Twelve: Build a Marriage that Preaches

(Ephesians 5:31-33)

Chapter Thirteen: Follow Him and Understand Her

(1 Peter 3:1-9)

Chapter Fourteen: Serve Like Jesus

(John 13:1-17)

Introduction

“I can’t live like this,” I announced to Howard after just a few months of marriage.

Howard and I both married twice. We experienced the joys and sorrows of marriage twice. We both lost our first spouses to illness in 2008 after twenty-three years of marriage for Howard and nineteen years for me. All seven of our children were born to our first marriages.

When we married at the end of 2010, five teenagers lived in our home. We fought often *over* the kids, and we fought often *with* the kids. Some days we wondered if our marriage would make it. The tension in our home sometimes made me want to run away, but I had nowhere to go.

I wondered where the sweet, kind-hearted man I married went. The chaos and conflict in our home brought out Howard’s harsh side and my emotional side. I felt like he was unreasonable. He thought I tried to take his authority. The excitement we shared when God gifted us with another wonderful partner faded quickly. I told Howard something had to change.

Desperate for help, I began paying to talk to someone who works as an adviser, or counselor. I had started

Hope for Marriage

questioning Howard's character and kindness since we fought so much. Rick, the counselor, reminded me that Howard is a good man. We just needed to learn how to talk about the children without fighting over them.

We each saw the parenting weaknesses of the other and felt defensive about our own kids, all of whom grieved the loss of a parent. Eventually we found a way to see each other as teammates, and slowly the joy returned to our marriage.

What is the purpose of marriage? Is it the thing that brings us happiness? Is it the thing that gives us confidence in life? Is it the moral way to give birth to children? Could marriage show us something about God? And the question everyone asks: "Is there any hope for marriage?"

In the United States almost half of marriages end in divorce.¹ Of those who stay married, many put up with each other but don't enjoy the relationship. I feel sad to see even Christians struggling to enjoy their marriages.

God created all things, including marriage. Do you think God created marriage for the purpose of divorce? Why would God create something like marriage if he thought we would just throw it away? God especially wants to see Christian marriages flourish so the world will see his character.

In *Hope for Marriage*, we'll look at God's creation and purpose for marriage. Each chapter begins with a story of conflict in a marriage followed by Bible teaching on the topic. Then you'll read how the couple in the story learned from Scripture and discussed their problems. Finally, you'll complete an assignment to help you and your spouse study Scripture together and work through your own conflict. I recommend not studying more than one chapter a week. You'll need time for discussion and practice.

Some of the suggested discussions could spark anger in either or both of you. Ask God for help and understanding. Commit to speaking to each other calmly as you talk through these assignments. If either of you gets too upset, set the topic aside for another time.

I pray you will find hope for your marriage. I also pray that your marriage will grow to reflect God's character, resulting in the kind of harmony that causes others to want God in their marriages.

CHAPTER ONE

Rule As Equals

Genesis 1:1, 26-31

The Challenge:

Petro and his wife Esta feel like strangers. Petro rules the household, expecting Esta and their children to obey his every desire. He tells them what to do and when to do it. Esta begs him to consider a gentler approach, but he screams at her with harsh words. She feels completely unimportant. When Petro wants intimacy, he often forces her as if she owes him her body. Esta cries out to God for help.

Imagine what Petro and Esta's marriage could look like if they both behave as God intended. They would always get along, always build one another up, always hold their tongues, never get angry, never feel jealous, and always exist as equals. The love between them would shine like a light to their friends and family. Instead, they find themselves pretending to act like a team, especially at church. They feel shame that they can't get along, and Esta feels desperate for someone to see her pain.

The Teaching: Rule as Equals

Marital struggles exist because we live in a sinful, broken world. God wants Christian marriages to show the world how much he loves us. How can we, along with people like Petro and Esta, find hope for healing in our marriages?

The first book in the Bible, Genesis, gives us the foundation for understanding God's plan for marriage. Genesis first answers the basic question "Does God exist?" The core belief that God exists should shape our behavior, our attitudes, and our marriages. And if God exists, we can trust him to heal a broken marriage.

God Creates Everything

In the beginning,
God created
the heavens
and the earth. (Gen. 1:1)

The first verse in the Bible tells us that God not only exists, but he also creates everything else that exists. Verses 2-25 tell the story of how God made the heavens (sky), the earth (land), and everything in between. Every day for five days, God commanded "Let there be" and something new appeared, including dry land, seas, plants, birds, fish, and land animals. At the end of each

day, God pronounced his entire creation “good.”

God Creates Male and Female

God made people as his final creative act. God’s creation of people includes one man and one woman: the first marriage. In fact, God’s plan for people includes four unique purposes.

1. God Creates Male and Female **in His Image.**

Then God said,
“Let us make man (people)
in our image,
after our likeness.
And let them have dominion (rule)
over the fish of the sea
and over the birds of the heavens
and over the livestock
and over all the earth
and over every creeping thing
that creeps on the earth.”

So God created man in his own image.
In the image of God he created them.
Male and female he created them. (Gen. 1:26-27)

God changes his command on day six of

creation from “Let there be” to “Let us.” This sudden change surprises us and grabs our attention. Immediately we ask, “Who is *us*?”

To answer this question, we must understand that God exists as one God in three persons—God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. All three persons of God participate in God’s creation. God the Father speaks all things into existence. The Spirit of God in Gen. 1:2 hovers over the waters “like an eagle hovers over its nest...preparing for his role in creation.”² “All things were made *through*” God’s son Jesus (also called the “Word” in John 1:1-3). When God says, “Let *us* make people,” he emphasizes the fact that all three persons of God will work as a team to create these special people.

Notice something else special about God’s creation of people: God planned beforehand to create people “in *our* image” and “after *our* likeness.” The *ABH Bible for Learning* tells us “these characteristics imply a physical resemblance between God and people.”³

While mystery exists as to how much we reflect God’s image in how we look, we

know God creates people to show a picture of himself in a way that no other part of his creation can. Think of how children resemble their parents, and you will catch a glimpse of what “after our likeness” means.

2. God Creates Male and Female **with Special Tasks.**

People also reflect God’s image by exercising the authority he gave them to rule over his creation. The author of Genesis describes the first couple’s authority over the earth:

And God blessed them
and God said to them,
“Be fruitful
and multiply
and fill the earth
and subdue it,
and have dominion (rule)
over the fish of the sea
and over the birds of the heavens
and over every living thing
that moves on the earth.” (Gen. 1:28)

God gave the man and the woman the responsibility of ruling and filling the earth.

He commanded both man and woman to rule over the animals. He also blessed them and commanded them to multiply themselves, filling the earth with children.

3. God Creates Male and Female **as Equals**.

God gives the man and woman equal responsibility in the tasks he expects them to accomplish. The reproduction of new life requires equal participation and teamwork by both man and woman. Since God expected the first couple to work as a team of equals in their marriage, he intends for all married couples to work together as a team of equals.

4. God Creates Male and Female **for Sweet Relationships**.

God commands man and woman to multiply and fill the earth with children and gives them pleasure in their intimacy. If God gives us pleasure in the act of conceiving children, he surely expects us to enjoy that pleasure. God allows women more than men to need a sweet relationship with their husband to fully enjoy the pleasure of intimacy. God built in a special need for husbands and wives to work together as a team to experience full intimacy

in their marriage.

God Celebrates His Creation

God looks at the marriage he created between the man and the woman and celebrates with joy.

And God saw everything that he had made.

And, behold, it was *very good*.

And there was evening, and there was morning,
the sixth day. (Gen. 1:31)

God looks at his creation on the first five days and calls it “good.” God looks at his creation of the man and woman on day six and now calls his creation “*very good*.” He considers his creation of man and woman very good in their likeness to him, in their differences, in their tasks and equality, and in their union and relationship with one another. We should agree with God’s assessment that his creation is “very good.” In your own marriage, celebrate your differences and work together as a team of equals.

Applications for Marriage:

After their pastor preached on Genesis 1 in church, Petro and Esta read through it together at home. They talked through each line in the verses as if they’d never read it before. Petro understood for the first time how

God created Esta as his equal and gave her to him as a gift. Until now he treated her more like his slave than his equal.

“I’m sorry I’ve treated you as an object for my pleasure,” Petro confessed. “I want to treat you as a precious creation of God. I want to experience a sweet relationship with you.”

“I’m sorry for hating you,” Esta joined in. “I understand that we are both made in God’s likeness. I promise to look at you as a special human made in God’s image from now on. May I have your permission to remind you to treat others more gently if you lash out, though? I will try to word my reminders in a respectful way.”

Petro and Esta began working together in their church. They also started making decisions as a team in their home. They worked at accomplishing a sweet relationship rather than just living in the same space. Their friends and other church members began calling them “ants” because they transformed from separate, unhappy individuals to a happy couple working as a team of equals.

Assignment: Set aside time to talk through Genesis 1:1 and 1:26-31 together. Ask yourselves the following questions.

1. Discuss what it means to your marriage that God made you in his likeness. What needs to change for both of you to look more like God?
2. List the tasks God gave to people in Gen. 1. Do you equally share in the tasks God assigned and in the tasks in your home?
3. Discuss how you can rule together as a team of equals. Gently tell each other if you don't feel equal and talk about what must change for you to feel like an equal.
4. Ask yourselves if you experience a sweet relationship with each other. How can you work together to create a genuine and sweet relationship?

Summary: Finding hope in marriage requires ruling *together* as a team of *equals*.

CHAPTER TWO

Receive God's Gift

Genesis 2:18-23

The Challenge:

Pastor Imani sees his wife, Mariam, as beautiful. He feels proud to introduce her as his wife, but he feels frustrated by her independent spirit. She speaks openly and loudly even in church meetings, travels frequently for business, and socializes with people Imani doesn't like. He tries to tame her new ideas and free-spirited behavior. Mariam feels frustrated that Imani wants to control her. He feels frustrated that she won't follow the typical role of a pastor's wife. She doesn't help him at all in the ministry.

How can Pastor Imani and Mariam learn to appreciate God's design in creating them uniquely but specifically as a gift to one another? How can they compromise so that Pastor Imani feels like he and his wife work as a team in ministry and Mariam doesn't feel controlled?

The Teaching: Receive God's Gift

Man's Aloneness is Not Good

In Chapter One we learned how God created the entire world in six days. After each day of creation, God pronounced everything he created “good.”

Genesis 2 describes Day Six in more detail when God creates the first man and woman. God forms the man first.

Then the Lord God formed the man of dust from
the ground
and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life,
and the man became a living creature. (Gen. 2:7)

God takes the time to form the man from dust and breathes life into his nostrils. In the middle of the story, though, God changes his language pattern from calling everything “good” to calling the man’s aloneness “not good.”

Then the LORD God said,
“It is *not good* that the man should be alone;
I will make him a helper fit for him.” (Gen. 2:18)

God promises to fix this “not good” situation by creating a helper who is just right for the man.

God had already provided mates for each kind of

animal, apparently creating them all at the same time. None of them could obey God's command to "be fruitful and multiply" without the other. Before making the man a helper, God parades all the animals past the man, asking him to name each one. Surely the man can't help noticing that, unlike these animals with mates, he remains alone. God wants the man to appreciate his gift of a partner when the time comes.

God Fixes Man's Aloneness

Take note of what God does *not* do when he creates the man's helper. He does *not* command, "Let there be woman." He does *not* stoop to form woman from the dust of the ground and breathe life into her. This time God does something unique and extraordinary.

So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon
the man,
and while he slept
[God] took one of his ribs
and closed up its place with flesh.
And the rib that the LORD God had taken from
the man
he [God] made into a woman
and brought her to the man. (Gen. 2:21-22)

God puts the man to sleep, opens up his skin, and removes a rib, or part of his side.⁴ Then he uses this

Hope for Marriage

part of the man's body to build a woman. God could easily command a woman to appear, or he could form a woman out of the dust in the same way he formed man. He could even have kept a piece out of Adam's body when he formed him. Instead, God purposely takes a piece from the man's side to build this unique woman.

Building the woman from a piece of the man makes them truly one. God wants husband and wife to live as one flesh. He wants them to exist as one mind and one body. God purposed man and wife to work together as a team in being fruitful and multiplying and in managing God's entire creation. In no way did God intend for this helper to be less important than the man.

God Presents a Perfect Gift

Once God completes building the woman, he presents her to the man as a gift. Woman exists as the final and most unique piece to God's beautiful creation and as a gift to man.

Women, we should feel honored by God's intentional creation of us because:

1. God took special care to build the woman uniquely from the man.

2. God created woman as the final amazing piece in all of creation.
3. God intentionally created woman as a gift to man.

God clearly sees women as unique, beautiful, important, complete, and equal to men.

Man Celebrates his Perfect Gift

The man celebrates God's special gift to him.

Then the man said,

“This at last is

- bone from my bones
- and flesh of my flesh.

She shall be called Woman

because she was taken out of man.” (Gen. 2:23)

The man recognizes that God fixed his aloneness problem by giving him a helper. He first acknowledges his wait for this special gift by exclaiming, “At last!” He sees how this special helper shares his bones and flesh. They exist as one body. Adam feels relief and great appreciation for the gift of this woman built just for him.

Men, God wants you to recognize that he never intended for man to live alone. He created people to

Hope for Marriage

want partnership and companionship. Just as women should feel blessed that God sees them as special, you should rejoice in God's special gift to you. He built your wife just for you like he built the first woman for the first man. God must care about you greatly to take special care in building a woman specifically for you.

Applications for Marriage:

Pastor Imani and Mariam studied Genesis 2 together and made a list of important points they learned. They discovered that:

1. God created the woman as a helper, not a servant, for the man (v. 18). She was to help him accomplish the tasks of multiplying, filling the earth, and ruling over God's creation. This task requires both man and woman equally.
2. Adam's aloneness exists as the only thing "not good" in creation. God's creation of the woman resolves the man's aloneness, making their togetherness "very good."
3. The man needed help. He remained incomplete without the woman. God created the woman to help the man accomplish the tasks given to him by God.
4. God built the woman specifically for the man as a perfectly matched helper.

5. The man rejoiced over God's gift of a perfect match for him.

"Mariam, I'm sorry for making my job more important than yours and for trying to force you to behave in a way that makes me feel comfortable," Imani apologized. "Honestly, my life would feel 'not good' without you in it. I don't want to control you, but I do wish you wouldn't travel at all," Imani pleaded. "Would you consider leaving only one or two nights a week? That would make me feel better. As our family grows, though, we may need to adjust that number again."

"I'm sorry, too, Imani, for thinking my desires and ideas are more important than yours. I want to fulfill my role as a helper to you at home and in the ministry. I also want to honestly express my thoughts and ideas. Would you be willing to talk over ways I can help you without feeling like I lose my uniqueness?"

"Okay, let's agree to calmly talk over our different perspectives while remembering that God gifted us with each other to work as a team."

When Imani and Mariam looked at the Scriptures and talked calmly about how these ideas should work in their marriage, they found the ability to work together as a team. They also talked about ways in which they are very different and yet how those differences can

complement each other instead of tearing them apart.

These discussions didn't fix every struggle or bad feeling between Imani and Mariam immediately. They made progress because both decided to see the other as a gift. They wanted to receive God's gift and find out why God chose each for the other.

Assignment: Set some time aside to study Genesis 2 together.

1. Like Pastor Imani and Mariam, write down important principles to learn from Genesis 2.
2. If you don't understand the principles Imani and Mariam learned, study the Scripture again to understand how they discovered those principles.
3. Talk through your differences and consider how God gifted you to each other for a purpose. Thank God together for one another.
4. Express your appreciation to God for his gift of your partner. Talk about specific ways you can show more appreciation for one another.

Summary: Finding hope for your marriage requires receiving your spouse as a perfectly designed gift from God.

CHAPTER THREE

Become One

John 17:20-23; Genesis 2:24-25

The Challenge:

Pastor Hector and his wife Coletta rarely do anything together. Coletta goes in one direction; Hector goes in the other. She makes her own decisions and makes her own plans. She goes to visit her mother for long periods of time without asking him if he minds. Hector feels hurt that she doesn't seem to care what he wants. He feels like she doesn't want to be with him. He lashes out in anger, demanding she stay home. When he lashes out, she leaves more often and stays away for longer periods of time.

The Teaching: Become One

Different marriages look different, but many of us would question the health of a marriage where couples never spend time together. While frequent togetherness may not prove oneness, a wise couple should examine why they rarely go anywhere together.

Marriage, according to Scripture, should look much like the relationship between God the Father and his

Son, Jesus. According to John 17, the Father and the Son exist as one unit.

The Father and Son Live as One

I do not ask for these only,
but also for those who will believe in me
through their word,
that they may all be one,
just as you, Father, are in me
and I in you,
that they also may be in us,
so that the world may believe
that you have sent me. (John 17:20-21)

Just before these verses, Jesus talks to his Father about his coming death. He focuses on what his disciples and other believers will face once he leaves the earth and returns to his Father in heaven. Jesus shows his love for believers by saying he wants them to experience the same kind of oneness that he and his Father experience (20-21).

Jesus defines the oneness between Father and Son as “You...are in me, and I am in you.” Just as our bodies, made up of many parts, make one unit, so the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit make up one God-unit. The church, also made up of many individuals, makes one church body that belongs to Christ.

We could define oneness as harmony, unity, or wholeness. The Father and Son live in harmony. They get along. They experience unity in their ideas and thoughts, and as a unit, they are whole and complete. They lack nothing. They exist as different individuals with different roles, but they function as a team of equals (as we learned in Chapter One).

Jesus prays specifically for believers (v. 20) and requests three things of his Father (v. 21):

- that all believers experience oneness with each other like the Father and his Son experience with each other.
- that all believers experience oneness with both the Father and Son like the Father and Son experience with each other.
- ultimately, Jesus wants this supernatural oneness that believers experience to encourage unbelievers to become believers.

Now that we understand oneness (unity) within the body of Christ and with the Father and Son, we can understand oneness (unity) in marriage.

The Goal for Marriage: Live as One

Then the man said,

“This at last is

- bone of my bones and
- flesh of my flesh.

She shall be called Woman

because she was taken out of Man.”

Therefore

- a man shall leave his father and his mother
- and hold fast to his wife,
- and they shall become one flesh. (Gen. 2:23-24)

In the last chapter, we saw how the man rejoices over the gift of the woman, which he calls “bone from my bones and flesh from my flesh.” Can you see why God specifically chose to build the woman from the man’s body? He wants them to not only look like one flesh as people, but God wants them to live as one flesh physically as well.

Man leaves his father and mother, clings to his wife, and they become one flesh (v.24). Man and woman become “one flesh” by clinging to one another and not to parents. They also become “one flesh” physically during sexual relations, which God designed for filling the earth, for pleasure, and to create a deep emotional

connection between man and woman.

God wants man and woman to become one spiritually as well. He wants us to experience a deep connection with God like the Father and Son experience in John 17.

- God wants husband and wife to experience the same oneness (unity) in relationship to *each other* that God the Father experiences with his Son.
- God wants husband and wife to experience unity with the *Father and Son* like the Father experiences with his Son.
- Ultimately, God wants the supernatural unity that husband and wife experience to encourage unbelievers to become believers.

If we define oneness as harmony, unity, and wholeness, then a married couple's relationship will look like the relationship between God the Father and his Son. They will get along. They will experience unity in how they think and act. Together they will be whole and complete, lacking nothing between them. Note that oneness does not indicate sameness. Husband and wife exist as unique individuals with different roles in the marriage, but they function together as a team.

Applications for Marriage:

Would you say Pastor Hector and Coletta experience unity in their marriage? No, not at all. Hector may desire unity in their marriage, but he doesn't know how to accomplish it. Instead of gently talking to Coletta about what she thinks, why she chooses her own path, and what she desires, he demands her presence. When he pressures her, she gets angry and pulls away.

Coletta may desire harmony, but because she doesn't experience it in her marriage or know how to ask for it, she creates a separate life for herself. Coletta's choice to live a separate life, though, *guarantees* a lack of harmony in her marriage.

Pastor Hector asked Coletta to set aside time for them to study John 17 and Genesis 2 together. He prayed ahead of time that God would soften both their hearts, allowing them to hear what God wanted to teach them. Before looking at the Scriptures, he prayed with Coletta and then spoke gently to her.

"I've held bitterness in my heart toward you because you wouldn't obey me, Coletta. I'm sorry. I want to follow God's lead in our relationship and in my life."

Coletta listened although she felt unsure if she could

trust her husband's change in behavior.

Hector read the Scriptures line-by-line and asked Coletta to tell him what she thought each verse meant. If he disagreed with her, he asked deeper questions instead of arguing. Together they listed three things God desires for believers and, therefore, for married couples.

“Do you think we experience oneness in our marriage?” Hector asked Coletta.

Without hesitation, she blurted out, “No!”

The next question brought shame: “Do you feel like either one of us experiences oneness with the Father and the Son?”

Sheepishly, she admitted, “There’s definitely room for improvement.”

And the last question cut like a knife: “Do you think our lack of oneness with each other and with God would ever encourage a non-believer to become a believer?”

Her resounding, “No,” brought them both to tears.

In that moment they both knew they needed to work to

Hope for Marriage

change their marriage. God called them into ministry, but their lack of unity in marriage prevented unity with the God they served.

“How can we change that?” asked Hector.

Hector and Coletta decided to spend time learning how to achieve oneness with God individually and as a couple. They encouraged one another to spend time in God’s Word alone, asking God to deepen their love for him. They also scheduled time each week to study God’s Word together.

Slowly, Coletta quit disappearing so often. Hector quit demanding her presence at home and in church. She started liking her new Hector more and found that she wanted to spend more time with him. She even started helping Hector in ministry. Over time, they began to feel more harmony in their relationship and with their heavenly Father.

A year later, Hector asked Coletta the same questions he asked when they first sat down to look at Scripture together. This time she answered that they had certainly made good progress.

Assignment: Study John 17:20-21 and Genesis 2:23-24 together. Ask yourselves the four questions Pastor Hector asked Coletta:

1. Do you think we experience the same kind of harmony in our marriage that God the Father and the Son experience in their relationship?
2. Do you think either of us experiences the same kind of oneness with the Father and Son that they experience with each other?
3. Do you think our unity as a couple or with God would ever encourage a non-believer to become a believer?
4. What needs to change?

Summary: Finding hope in marriage requires growing in oneness with God first and then with your spouse.

CHAPTER FOUR

Avoid Rebelling Against God

Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7

The Challenge:

While giving birth to their first son, Musa, Pastor Ezekiel's wife, Sara, ripped severely. She experienced so much pain that intimacy became too difficult. Sara also kept busy caring for and nursing Musa. Ezekiel felt neglected, unwanted, and unimportant.

A woman named Naomi pranced into church one Sunday morning, dressed beautifully from head to toe. The smile on her face radiated confidence, joy, and satisfaction with life. Naomi approached Pastor Ezekiel after church, gushing over his sermon, noting how blessed his wife must feel.

Over time, Ezekiel confided Sara's injuries and preoccupation with the baby to Naomi. He believed he deserved happiness and allowed himself to imagine how satisfied Naomi could make him.

Pastor Ezekiel knew the boundaries and the risks, but he didn't care. In his desperation to feel important,

Ezekiel let his own desires take over. Naomi came to him at his weakest moment, and he gave in to her. Now it was too late. He couldn't go back and pretend he hadn't committed adultery. He felt sudden shame, immediately wanting to hide from Sara.

The Teaching: Avoid Rebelling Against God

In Genesis 2, which describes Day Six of creation, God forms the first man, Adam, out of dust, builds a garden for him, places him in the garden, and causes plants and trees to grow. The garden includes two trees, the Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. Once the man settles into his garden home, God informs him of the rules he needs to follow to continue living there.

God's One Rule

And the LORD God commanded the man, saying,
“You may surely eat of every tree of the garden,
but of the tree of the knowledge of good and
evil you shall not eat,
for in the day that you eat of it you shall
surely die.” (Gen. 2:16-17)

God begins with the good news. (I will tell the story in my own words to relate it to this chapter's teaching).

“Adam,” God said, “I love you. Look at all the variety,

the beautiful and luscious plants I created just for you. You are more than welcome to eat from every tree in this garden. As you can see, I provided thousands of options for you.”

Now God adds the bad news. “But, Adam, because I love you, I must warn you to stay away from one tree. You may not eat from this one tree because it will open your eyes to the difference between good and evil which, believe me, you don’t want to know. That fruit will kill you the very day you eat it.”

God’s instructions might feel like a strong warning, but they also hold compassion. Just as we warn children to stay away from dangerous situations, God warns Adam of the one fruit that poses a danger to him.

God gives this command to Adam (v. 16-17) before he creates the woman, Eve (v. 22). The Scriptures don’t tell us how or when Adam passes this information on to Eve, or if God tells her himself. The next conversation tells us she knows the rules, however.

People Ignore God’s Rule

Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made.

He said to the woman,
“Did God actually say,

‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?’”
(Gen. 3:1)

God informs *Adam* which tree to avoid, but the crafty, scheming serpent purposely approaches *Eve*. The serpent plants doubt in Eve and twists God’s words by stating exactly the opposite of what God told Adam.

And the woman said to the serpent,
“We may eat of the fruit of the trees
in the garden,
but God said,
‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree
that is in the midst of the garden,
neither shall you touch it,
lest you die.’” (Gen.3:2-3)

Eve correctly states that they can eat fruit from all the trees except the one in the middle of the garden. She adds to God’s words, though, when she says they can’t even touch the tree. God actually said they would die the day they eat the fruit, not the day they touch the tree’s fruit.

But the serpent said to the woman,
“You will not surely die.
For God knows that when you eat of it
your eyes will be opened,
and you will be like God,

knowing good and evil.” (Gen. 3:4-5)

The serpent progresses from twisting God’s words to directly contradicting God. He accuses God, the Creator of all things, of lying. He says Adam and Eve won’t die if they disobey and eat from the tree. Instead, they will become like God, understanding the difference between good and evil.

The serpent offers Eve a shortcut to knowledge by disobeying God’s strict command. God created Adam and Eve in the “likeness of God” (see Gen. 1:26-27). God entrusted Adam and Eve with the responsibility of ruling over all the animals and the land he created. They were the two created beings most like God and yet with one restriction. The serpent doesn’t acknowledge God’s faith in Adam and Eve, and Eve fails to remember it. Does Eve fall for the serpent’s tricks?

So when the woman saw
that the tree was good for food,
and that it was a delight to the eyes,
and that the tree was to be desired to make
one wise,
she took of its fruit
and ate,
and she also gave some to her husband who was
with her
and he ate. (Gen. 3:6)

Eve correctly sees that the tree can provide great food and is one of the most beautiful trees in the garden (Gen. 2:9). She understands God's wisdom and believes the serpent when he says eating from the tree will also make her wise. She wants what isn't hers, excuses her actions, takes a piece of fruit, devours it, and then offers it to Adam.

“Wait just a minute. Where is Adam all this time?” Adam is right there beside Eve (v. 6). Not once does he open his mouth to correct her. He knows God's warning and yet remains completely silent. He takes the fruit and opens his mouth to eat it in direct rebellion to God.

Then the eyes of both were opened,
and they knew that they were naked.
And they sewed fig leaves together
and made themselves loincloths. (Gen. 3:7)

Can you imagine the moment Adam and Eve's eyes open to the truth? Imagine the weight landing on their shoulders when they experience evil for the first time. Suddenly they recognize their nakedness. They cover themselves and hide from God in shame.

Adam and Eve's disobedience immediately brings trouble on themselves and sin to the entire human race. Their brokenness creates brokenness for all

marriages to come as well.

Applications for Marriage:

Pastor Ezekiel, like Adam and Eve, disobeyed God by thinking only of what he wanted in his moment of weakness. His sin not only affected him and his role as pastor, but it will also greatly affect his marriage.

Pastor Ezekiel knew he needed to talk to Sara about what happened. He didn't feel close to her anymore, though, and wondered how he could face her. He felt ashamed of himself but also afraid of her reaction. He thought maybe he could ignore the problem and hide from Sara. She occupied herself with the baby anyway. Maybe she wouldn't even notice.

Assignment: Study Genesis 2:16-17 and Genesis 3:1-7 together. Talk about the differences between God's words, the serpent's words, and Eve's words. Ask yourselves the following questions.

1. Why did the serpent approach Eve instead of Adam?
2. Why did Adam not stop Eve?
3. Why did Adam eat the fruit without hesitation?
4. Who does God hold responsible for this sin and why? (Look at Gen. 3:17-19.)

5. Share something with your spouse that distracts you from the truth of God's Word. How does this distraction tempt you to sin or to not trust God?
6. Talk about ways you can encourage one another to follow God's Word instead of rebelling against God.

Summary: Finding hope in your marriage requires gently encouraging each other to study and obey God's Word and to avoid rebelling against God.

CHAPTER FIVE
Avoid Blame

Genesis 3:8-13

The Challenge:

The moment Ezekiel arrived home Sara knew something was terribly wrong. He refused to look her in the eye and kept disappearing when she talked to him.

“Please tell me what’s wrong, Zeke,” Sara begged.

“Nothing,” Ezekiel shot back.

“I can tell something’s wrong.”

“Nothing’s wrong!”

“What happened?”

“Leave me alone. I don’t know why you constantly put pressure on me!” Zeke yelled. “Anyway, you don’t care. You never meet my needs!”

Pastor Ezekiel found himself in a losing situation. He kept hoping if he could hide from Sara the problem

Hope for Marriage

would go away.

The Teaching: Avoid Blame

Adam and Eve hope hiding from God will make their problem go away, too.

Shame

And they heard the sound of the LORD GOD
walking in the garden in the cool of the day,
and the man and his wife hid themselves
from the presence of the LORD GOD
among the trees of the garden.

But the LORD GOD called to the man and said to him,
“Where are you?” (Gen. 3:8-9)

Until now, Adam and Eve welcomed the sound of God walking in the garden. They enjoyed a close relationship with him. After disobeying God and experiencing evil, they now feel shame and rightly fear God. After all, God told them they would die the day they ate the fruit from the forbidden tree.

Hiding

God knows where to find Adam and Eve, but he calls to them anyway.

And he [Adam] said,

“I heard the sound of you in the garden,
and I was afraid,
because I was naked,
and I hid myself.”

He [God] said,

“Who told you that you were naked?
Have you eaten of the tree
of which I commanded you not to eat?” (Gen.
3:10-11)

Adam responds to God without answering the question, “Where are you?” Next, Adam throws out four guilt-confirming statements:

- I heard you.
- I was afraid.
- I was naked.
- I hid myself.

Adam hides because he fears the consequences, but hiding doesn't do him any good. God sees right through his reasons for hiding. God asks a clever follow-up question: “Who told you that you were naked?” Adam didn't seem bothered by his nakedness before. Why would he suddenly feel ashamed of his nakedness now? The fact that Adam suddenly notices his nakedness tells God everything he needs to know. Adam's behavior screams “guilty!”

People often attempt to hide their guilt since guilt causes shame. Adam and Eve behave no differently. Instead of admitting their guilt, they blame others.

Blame

The man said,

“The woman whom you gave to be with me,
she gave me fruit of the tree,
and I ate.”

Then the LORD GOD said to the woman,

“What is this that you have done?”

The woman said,

“The serpent deceived me,
and I ate.” (Gen. 3:12-13)

Adam blames Eve, and Eve blames the serpent. Adam even blames God: “the woman you gave me...” Remember the beautiful gift for whom Adam praised God just fourteen verses ago? “This is at last bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh” (Gen. 2:23). Adam now turns on his beautiful gift, blaming her for his own sin.

Remember also the perfect world God created (Gen. 1)? Sin suddenly enters our perfect world, replacing perfection with brokenness (Gen. 3). Sin steals our opportunity for oneness in marriage and brokenness takes its place.

Applications for Marriage:

“What do you mean, I never meet your needs?” Sara questioned.

“You complain that you’re in pain and excuse yourself to help the baby. You’re never there for me.”

“Oh, so what did you do? Did you find another woman?”

Silence.

“You slept with another woman? How could you do that to me? You’re always forceful and unkind to me. Why would I want to meet your needs?”

“That’s my point!” Ezekiel screamed. “At least she cares about my needs.”

Assignment: Study Genesis 3:8-13 together. This assignment may draw lots of heated emotion. Agree to talk calmly and honestly with the goal of resolving problems instead of making them worse. Pray together and determine to remain calm.

1. Share with each other a time when you felt grateful for your marriage. What did you appreciate about your spouse at that time?
2. Tell each other when your relationship began

to fall apart. What happened and how did it make you feel?

3. Take responsibility and apologize for your part in the breakdown of your marriage without blaming your spouse.
4. Pray together, asking God for guidance and direction in working through the problems that have entered your marriage.
5. Each of you agree to make one specific change in your behavior toward your spouse this week.

Summary: Finding hope for your marriage requires accepting responsibility for your brokenness without blaming your spouse.

CHAPTER SIX

Forgive Each Other

Matthew 18:21-35

The Challenge:

“I will never forgive you! You just need to leave,” Sara ordered.

Pastor Ezekiel stormed out although he had no place to go.

Sara collapsed to the ground, shaking with tears as Musa screamed for milk. Sara wondered if she could muster the strength to pick up her baby.

Sara couldn't imagine a day when she would find the strength to forgive Zeke. He had committed the worst sin against her and shattered her heart into pieces.

The Teaching: Forgive Each Other

No Limit to Forgiveness

Jesus's disciple, Peter, struggles with the idea of forgiveness when he asks Jesus how often he should forgive.

Then Peter came up and said to him,
“Lord, how often will my brother sin against me,
and I forgive him?
As many as seven times?” (Matt. 18:21)

Jesus responds to Peter without considering his specific circumstances. Jesus doesn’t ask what the person did to cause hurt. He doesn’t ask about the person’s character. He doesn’t ask if the person apologized.

Jesus said to him,
“I do not say to you seven times,
but seventy-seven times.” (Matt. 18:22)

Jesus leaves no room for excusing oneself from forgiving others. Peter may find it hard to forgive someone who wronged him seven times. Jesus says to forgive seventy-seven times, a number that may feel impossible to Peter. Jesus means we must forgive as many times as someone sins against us. Forgiveness means Peter doesn’t hold someone’s sin against them and he doesn’t wish evil on them. He always chooses to forgive or let the hurt feelings go. Jesus gives Peter no limit to how many times he should forgive because God’s forgiveness of us comes with no limit.

“But Pastor Ezekiel committed adultery,” you might argue. “Sara shouldn’t have to forgive him.” You might even claim that those who sin against you don’t

deserve forgiveness.

Forgive as God Forgives

Jesus explained himself to Peter by telling a story:

The kingdom of heaven is like a king who shows mercy on his servant who owes him so much money that it would take him 164,000 years to pay back. The king forgives his servant's debts. His servant, though, shows no mercy to a fellow servant who owes him only an amount equal to three months' wages. When news gets back to the king that his servant showed no mercy, the king justly throws him in prison (Matt. 18:23-24, summarized).

Like the first servant, our debt to God surpasses our ability to ever pay. Our sins deserve punishment and eternal death. Yet God chooses to forgive us because his Son paid our debt in full. When others sin against us, they owe us a "debt." We should forgive them because God forgives us. God also forgives those who sin against us. The sin of others against us fades when compared to our great sins against God. If God can forgive our huge debt, we can forgive those who sin against us, including our spouse's debt to us.

Warning about Unforgiveness

Instead of forgiving his fellow servant's debt, the king's servant turns on him. He chokes him and sends him to prison. Jesus warns us against unforgiveness with these words:

So also my heavenly Father will do to every one
of you,
if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.
(Matt. 18:35)

Our heavenly Father won't forgive our sins if we don't forgive others. That's serious.

We must understand Jesus's teaching correctly without making wrong assumptions. Consider the following:

1. Jesus doesn't say we should allow people to continue sinning against us. He simply says we need to forgive those who sin against us. For example, if Pastor Ezekiel continues in adultery, Sara must forgive him, but she shouldn't accept his choice to continue in adultery.
2. Jesus says we must forgive others if we want God to forgive us. Sara's forgiveness of Ezekiel benefits her. If she forgives Ezekiel, God will forgive her.

3. Forgiveness is a command and an action, not a feeling. Sara could choose to forgive Ezekiel in obedience to God's command but still feel anger and sadness over his unfaithfulness.
4. Sara chooses to forgive Ezekiel by not wishing evil on him even though she may not trust him enough to let him move back home yet.
5. Although forgiveness isn't a feeling, some feelings must fuel the act of forgiveness. It must come "from the heart," meaning you must find enough compassion to want to forgive, not just to say you forgive.

Forgiveness is as basic to the Christian life as faith. We trust in Jesus's death as the complete and only payment for our sins. God sees our faith and makes us right with him by forgiving our sins. We receive the gift of salvation because God forgave all our sins.

If we choose not to forgive someone else, then we lack understanding of how much God forgave us. We will not experience and enjoy the fullness of God's complete forgiveness if we refuse to forgive others.

If we persist in unforgiveness, we should evaluate the genuineness of our faith.

Applications for Marriage:

Pastor Ezekiel found Sara at the market a few days later and asked if they could talk. Reluctantly, Sara agreed.

“Sara, I wronged you, and I’m sorry. I was foolish.”

“Yes, very foolish,” Sara agreed. “Do you realize what you have done to me and Musa? How will we ever survive without your income?”

“I was hoping we could work things out and you’d let me come back home.” Zeke looked sheepish.

“I don’t know, Zeke. How can I ever trust you again? How do I even know if it’s over with the other woman?”

“Will you go to the elders of the church with me? I will confess my sin and ask for help.”

“That’s a start, but I will make no promises. You have a lot of work to do.”

Sara agreed to talk to the elders at the church. Zeke wasn’t hiding his sin anymore, but she still didn’t trust him.

Assignment: Set some time aside to study Matthew

18:21-35 together. Answer these questions:

1. Why did Jesus leave no room for excusing yourself from forgiving the worst sin against you?
2. Pray that God will give you supernatural power and love to forgive your spouse for all wrongs.
3. Husband, take the lead. Ask your wife how you've hurt or mistreated her. Don't defend yourself and don't blame her. Listen until she finishes. Agree with her that your sin hurt her. Ask her to forgive you. Give her as much time as she needs to answer.
4. Wife, follow your husband's lead. Ask how you've hurt or disrespected him. Don't defend yourself, and don't blame him. Listen until he finishes. Agree with him that your sin hurt him. Ask him to forgive you. Give him as much time as he needs to answer.

Summary: Finding hope for your marriage requires forgiving your spouse completely and repeatedly because God continues to forgive you.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Rely on The Spirit's Power

Galatians 5:13-24

The Challenge:

Sara met her husband at the church, still feeling angry and lost. Silent tears streamed from her eyes.

Pastor Ezekiel sat down, shoulders sagging as if life drained from him. Sara had half a mind to feel sorry for him, but her feelings of despair squashed her compassion.

Elder James spoke first. "It looks like we have something difficult to discuss. Pastor, would you like to begin?"

Pastor Ezekiel shifted in his seat and cleared his throat. The words wouldn't come.

"I...I...uh...I...was...so...foolish." Tears spilled out with the words.

The Teaching: Rely on the Spirit's Power

The Law Summarized

You may wonder by this point where we find the strength to follow God's ways and make changes in our marriage. We may read God's Word but still find obedience difficult. Sometimes we try to do the right thing but end up in a fighting match instead.

...through love serve one another.

For the whole law is fulfilled in one word:

“You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

But if you bite and devour one another,
watch out that you are not consumed by one
another. (Gal. 5:13c-15)

We can summarize the entire law with one word: love. If we fight and destroy one another, we produce the opposite of love. Think about these verses in the context of marriage. Fighting and destroying one another defeats the purpose of oneness in marriage. Fighting destroys each other, which destroys your marriage. Consider serving one another out of a heart of love.

The Source of Power

God sent his Holy Spirit to give us the power to live his

way. Paul explains why we need the Holy Spirit and how he empowers us. We need the Holy Spirit to help us keep from destroying our marriage.

But I say, walk by the Spirit,
and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.
For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit,
and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh,
for these are opposed to each other,
to keep you from doing the things you want to do.
But if you are led by the Spirit,
you are not under the law. (Gal. 5:16-18)

Paul offers a simple answer to keep us from destroying each other: walk by the Spirit. He contrasts “walking by the Spirit” with allowing ourselves to fulfill the “desires of the flesh,” or our sinful desires. The desires of the flesh fight against the Spirit. The Spirit sets us free from the law of sin and gives us the power to follow God’s ways.

Works of the Flesh

Our sinful desires lead us to the works of the flesh (selfish sinful behavior) listed below:

- sexual immorality (any sex outside of marriage)
- impurity (the opposite of clean or pure)
- sensuality (giving pleasure to your physical

senses, especially sexual pleasure)⁵

- idolatry (worshipping idols)
- sorcery (witchcraft)
- enmity (hatred)
- strife (fighting)
- jealousy (envy)
- fits of anger (rage)
- rivalries (competition)
- dissensions (conflicts)
- divisions (breaks in relationship)
- envy (jealousy)
- drunkenness
- orgies (sexual parties)
- and things like these

I warn you, as I warned you before,
that those who do such things will not inherit the
kingdom of God. (Gal. 5:19-21)

Works of the Spirit

When we walk by the Spirit we follow the Spirit's desires and leading. The Spirit's desires stand completely opposed to our selfish desires. As we walk with the Spirit, our lives produce fruit—or behavior that completely differs from our fleshly, selfish behavior. This fruit of the Spirit, or loving and godly behavior, includes the following:

But the fruit of the Spirit is

- love
- joy
- peace
- patience
- kindness
- goodness
- faithfulness
- gentleness
- self-control
- against such things there is no law.
(Gal. 5:22-23)

Verse 24 summarizes a Spirit-filled life instead of a flesh-filled life:

And those who belong to Christ Jesus
have crucified the flesh
with its passions and desires. (Gal. 5:24)

When we belong to Jesus, our flesh (selfishness) dies just like Jesus did. Jesus died the way many murderers died at the time—by being nailed to a tree. Jesus didn't deserve this punishment, but he died willingly to set us free from sin. Believers “die” with Christ to their flesh (selfishness) and become new people who produce the Spirit's fruit.

We must sincerely ask God for help in learning to walk

Hope for Marriage

by the Spirit. Consider how a child learns to walk. We learn to walk in the Spirit the same way, by taking a few steps and falling. We get back up and take more steps, and gradually we fall less often. Eventually we can stay on our feet and no longer think about every step.

Applications for Marriage:

Sara and Ezekiel agreed to meet with Elder James regularly to study God's Word and talk about their marriage. Ezekiel realized he never studies the Scriptures for understanding or guidance in his own life. He sees his weekly preaching only as a job.

Pastor Ezekiel read the list of sinful behaviors in Galatians 5 and saw his own sinfulness. Sexual immorality topped the list. He took Sara's hand and drew a deep breath.

"I'm sorry I haven't been very compassionate about your injury. All I could think about was how it affected me. I've been so selfish. Will you forgive me?"

Hesitantly, Sara responded, "I will choose to trust the Holy Spirit to help me forgive you, but I'm not ready for you to move back home. I need time to see that I can trust you, but I'm encouraged by these Bible studies and our conversations. Thank you for making

the effort.”

Assignment: Set time aside to study Galatians 5 together.

1. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you discuss these difficult words without fighting.
2. Honestly consider whether you are fighting against each other and destroying your marriage. Calmly discuss the things you fight about. Are those things more important than honoring God through your marriage?
3. Look at both lists in Gal. 5. How many items in each list describe you?
4. Ask your spouse to identify how your actions fit each list. Agree with his/her assessment and ask for forgiveness.
5. Together, ask God to help you learn to walk by the Spirit in your individual lives as well as in your marriage.
6. Name one thing you will each do to begin learning to walk by the Spirit.

Summary: Finding hope in your marriage requires reliance on the Holy Spirit’s power to transform you and your marriage.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Submit to Authorities

Romans 13:1-7

The Challenge:

Samuel barely spoke a word during dinner. Neema asked about his fishing expedition, but he just grunted, ignoring the question.

“What happened to make you so angry?” Neema asked gently.

“I don’t know. The government is so stupid!” Samuel snapped.

“What do you mean?”

“They want us to keep a count of the fish we catch and report it to them. I’m not going to do that!”

“Why won’t you do that? If they find out they could take everything we own from us,” Neema cautioned.

“I don’t care. As it is, they’ll tax our income and we won’t have enough money to live on anymore,” Samuel huffed.

Hope for Marriage

“I know you aren’t in the mood to hear this, but don’t you insist I do everything you ask because you are my leader? Why aren’t you willing to do what your leaders require of you?”

“It’s just different.”

Just then someone knocked on the door.

The Teaching: Submit to Authorities

Why would we include a chapter on submitting to the government in a marriage book? Because how we understand submission to authorities impacts how we approach submission in marriage. Some people say they don’t have to submit to their authorities, especially if they don’t agree with them.

The biblical phrase “to submit” means to willingly place yourself under someone else’s authority or leadership.⁶ Let’s look at what God says about submission to the government before we address marital submission in Chapter Nine.

Submission to Authorities

Paul, the author of Romans, clearly states that God places governing authorities in their leadership

positions. Because he gives them authority, he expects us to place ourselves under their authority.

Let every person be subject to the
governing authorities.

For there is no authority except from God,
and those that exist have been instituted by
God.

Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists
what God has appointed,
and those who resist will incur judgment.

For rulers are not a terror to good conduct,
but to bad.

Would you have no fear of the one who is
in authority?

Then do what is good, and you will receive
his approval,
for he is God's servant for your good.

But if you do wrong, be afraid,
for he does not bear the sword in vain.

For he is the servant of God,
an avenger who carries out God's wrath on
the wrongdoer.

Therefore one must be in subjection,
not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the
sake of conscience.

For because of this you also pay taxes,
for the authorities are ministers of God,

attending to this very thing. (Rom. 13:1-6)

Three times in seven verses Paul says God gives all authorities their positions. Three times in the same seven verses Paul says these authorities work as “servants” or “ministers” of God. Because of their God-given position, they serve him even if they don’t want to. They serve him even if they don’t believe in him. Anyone who resists authorities, therefore, also resists God.

Submission to authorities over you means willingly choosing to place yourself under the leadership of your authorities. Romans 13 says we should do this because God placed them in authority over us, making them instruments for his service. We should show them respect by submitting to them and to the law whether we like it or not. We show submission to God by submitting to those he puts in authority over us.

Submission to the Law

Submission involves obedience to the law but goes beyond that. A Christian should be a model citizen of a village or community. Paul describes a Christian citizen’s attitude when he advises,

Pay to all what is owed to them:

- taxes to whom taxes are owed,

- revenue to whom revenue is owed,
 - respect to whom respect is owed,
 - honor to whom honor is owed.
- (Rom. 13:7)

If we call ourselves followers of God, we should obey his command to accept our government's authority. Outsiders should know us as people who pay our taxes and our debts. Outsiders should also know believers as those who show respect and honor to those who hold authority over us.

Submission to God First

Sometimes, however, authorities ask us to do something wrong. Then we must choose to obey God rather than the authorities. Some examples appear in the following Scripture verses:

- Two Hebrew midwives disobeyed the king's command to kill male children (Exodus 1:15-22).
- A prostitute named Rahab hid two Israelite spies from the king of Jericho when the king wanted to kill them (Joshua 2:1-24).
- King David's servants should have disobeyed when he asked them to bring a married woman to him for his pleasure (2 Samuel 11:1-5).

Applications for Marriage:

Neema answered the door and called to her husband, “Samuel, it’s Pastor Jeremiah.”

She turned back to greet the pastor. “Welcome, Pastor Jeremiah. We were just talking about a spiritual matter.”

Pastor Jeremiah stepped through the door. “Oh, really? Tell me about it.”

Samuel didn’t stop to greet the pastor. “Neema says we should obey those in authority over us even if we disagree with them. I disagree.”

“That’s interesting. The Bible says God places government officials in authority over us,” responded Pastor Jeremiah. “He says we should obey our authorities.”

“I don’t care what God says. I’m not doing it,” Samuel shot back.

“Do you understand that God holds authority over us whether we like it or not?” questioned the pastor.

“God is mean. He doesn’t care if we suffer and work too hard just for the government to take it back,” Samuel

complained.

“The Bible says God loves us so much he sent his only Son Jesus to earth to take the punishment for our sin. He invites us to join his family by receiving the gifts of forgiveness and eternal life offered freely through Jesus” (John 3:16).

“Forgiveness? For what?” Samuel mocked.

Pastor Jeremiah smiled. “Forgiveness for our sins, Samuel. The Bible says that ‘all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23). If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved (Rom. 10:9). When we do that, we experience peace with God.”

“There is no peace in this life. Do you really believe that stuff?” Samuel almost shouted.

Pastor Jeremiah remained calm and steady. “I do. Believing that stuff is the only way to experience peace in this life. Following God and accepting his authority brings me unbelievable peace, and even hope.”

“You know, placing myself under your authority isn’t the easiest,” Neema added. “But I do it because I love you and I want you to see God’s peace in me. Nothing

would make me happier than for you to submit yourself to God. You would experience peace like you've never known before, and we could serve God together."

"Hmmm...."

Assignment: Study Romans 13:1-7 together and answer the questions:

1. Who is our ultimate authority in verse 1 (the one who assigns all other authorities)?
2. Why does verse 4 say we should obey our authorities ("God's servants")?
3. Name two more reasons to submit to the authorities whom God assigns (v.5).
4. If obeying God's assigned authorities means we obey God, and if by obeying them we avoid God's wrath, can you think of any good reasons to disobey them?
5. What circumstances might force you to disobey government authorities or an employer? Think of two or three examples.
6. Consider the story of Samuel and Neema. Neema believes in obeying God's authority. She finds hope and peace in following God. Have you found hope and peace in God? If not, would you accept his gift of forgiveness now by telling him you are a sinner and need

his help to follow him?

Summary: Finding hope in your marriage requires a willing decision to place yourself under your governmental authorities because God placed them over you. You submit to God when you submit to your authorities.

CHAPTER NINE

Submit to Each Other

Genesis 5:1-2, 15-21

The Challenge:

“The Bible says I’m the leader in this home. Do as I say,” Pastor Daudi demanded.

“I don’t think the Bible says you have to be so mean,” Salome responded. “It’s very frustrating to sense you don’t care how I think or feel. I would follow your lead more easily if you treated me with kindness and asked for my input. Honestly, I feel like I have no rights at all sometimes.”

“Shut up and do as I say!”

Salome silently returned to her tasks with a broken heart. She wondered if her husband would ever appreciate her thoughts, opinions, or ideas.

The Teaching: Imitate God by Submitting to Each Other

Christian men may correctly understand that God

called them to lead in their homes. They often forget that Christian leadership begins by imitating God, however. Imitating God includes submission to one another. In fact, all believers must learn to imitate God in how they treat others. Ephesians 5:1 tells us we must imitate God in the same way that children imitate their fathers.

Therefore be imitators of God,
as beloved children. (Eph. 5:1)

Ephesians 5 gives clear instruction to husbands and wives, including the topic of submission. We must keep in mind that Paul's instruction to husbands and wives also begins with imitating God.

Imitate Christ in How you Walk

Paul gives us three ways to imitate Christ in the way we walk the Christian life. He purposely gives this instruction before addressing the topic of marriage later in Ephesians 5.

1. Walk in Love

Believers must love others in the same way Jesus loves us by giving up our lives for one another. God may not ask us to die for someone else, but as an act of worship to God, he does want us to meet the needs of others

before our own. Nonbelievers should expect believers to exemplify sacrificial love in all relationships, including marriage.

2. Walk in the Light

Believers must walk in God's light, not in the darkness of sin. We have been set free from sin. Nonbelievers should recognize believers as those who live in the light of God's goodness and truth (vs. 8-14).

3. Walk in Wisdom

We must imitate God by walking in wisdom rather than foolishness. Nonbelievers should recognize believers as those who make wise choices in all areas of their lives.

Fill Yourself with the Holy Spirit

Just before Paul gets to the topic of marriage, he adds one more important point: Imitating God means wisely filling ourselves with the Holy Spirit instead of with alcohol.

And do not get drunk with wine,
for that is debauchery,
but be filled with the Spirit,
addressing one another in psalms and hymns
and spiritual songs,

singing and making melody to the Lord with
your heart,
giving thanks always
and for everything to God the Father in the
name of our Lord Jesus Christ,
submitting to one another out of reverence for
Christ. (Eph. 5: 18-21)

The use of alcohol or anything other than the Holy Spirit to meet our needs leads to evil (debauchery). Filling ourselves with the Holy Spirit gives us the ability to show love and kindness to one another, allowing us to:

- speak to one another with a heart of joy,
- sing praises to the Lord,
- give thanks regularly, and
- submit to one another.

Imitate Christ by Submitting to Each Another

Paul writes Ephesians to all believers, not just to husbands and wives. As believers imitate Christ, we begin to interact with each other in Christ-like ways. Submitting to each other comes naturally as we imitate Christ and fill ourselves with the Holy Spirit.

We learned in Chapter Eight that the biblical phrase “to submit” means to willingly place yourself under

someone else's authority or leadership.⁷ "To submit" can also mean willingly yielding your own needs or desires to someone else's. Notice that the word "willingly" indicates we do this by choice.

Jesus gives us the best example of submission in Luke 22. He willingly submitted to the Father's authority when he came to earth. He lived in a broken world and died on a tree to take the sin of the entire world on himself. Jesus didn't want to experience terrible suffering or die a horrible death.

Father, if you are willing,
remove this cup from me.
Nevertheless, not my will
but yours be done. (Luke 22:42)

Jesus pled with God to withdraw the very reason for which he came to this earth. But then he submitted his will to the Father's will, knowing his death would "become the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him" (Heb. 5:9).

Let's look at how submission plays out practically in everyday life. As believers, we should place ourselves under God-given leadership, including governing authorities and church leaders. In our jobs we place ourselves under those in authority over us, whether they are male or female. Believers making decisions

within the church should willingly yield their own desires to others instead of insisting on their own way. The power to do this comes from the filling of the Holy Spirit.

Applications for Marriage:

Pastor Daudi walked away angrily. Salome's words kept ringing in his ears: "I don't think the Bible means you have to be so mean." He never considered his words as mean, just correct. He thought he had every right to demand what he wanted. After all, Ephesians 5 said his wife should submit to him.

Daudi pulled his Bible off the shelf and opened it to Ephesians 5. Instead of starting in the middle of the chapter he decided to start at verse 1.

"Oh, no!" he snorted to himself. "I thought the Bible said I could demand my own way. Jesus loved us so much that he gave up his life for me. I sure haven't loved my wife that way. Ephesians 5 says first to 'walk in love, in the light, in wisdom, and to be filled with the Spirit.' I see a sermon coming on here. Wow! Verse 21 says to submit to *one another*. I never noticed that before!"

"Salome, you've got to come here. I have something to show you."

“What’s that, Daudi?”

“You were right. Look at what Ephesians 5 says...”

Assignment: Set aside time to study Ephesians 5:1-2 and 15-21 together.

1. Name two of God’s character qualities in these verses that we should imitate.
2. Do you ever place yourselves under the authority of other believers? How does that feel? Why do you or don’t you submit to other believers?
3. Name a time when you yielded your own desire to someone else’s desire. Why did you do that? Name an example of a time when you shouldn’t yield to someone else’s desire.
4. Name one way each of you can yield to the other one’s desire.
5. Pray together and ask God to help you imitate him in submitting to each other.

Summary: Finding hope in marriage requires us to imitate God and willingly submit to each other.

CHAPTER TEN

Submit to Your Husband

Ephesians 5:21-24

The Challenge:

“Look at this, Salome. I never saw this before.” Pastor Daudi pointed to his Bible with new energy as he began reading to Salome. “Did you know believers are to submit to one another, not just wives to husbands?”

“Not really. I just know God isn’t mean, and I couldn’t figure out why husbands think they can be mean. You know, I would find it easier to submit if you treated me kindly. I would also submit easier if you would consider my feelings.”

“I’m sorry I’ve been mean. I guess I used my leadership as an excuse to get what I want. Let’s look at the next part of the chapter and see if we can learn together how our marriage should look.”

The Teaching: Wife, Imitate God by Submitting to your Husband

Remember the biblical word “to submit” means to

Hope for Marriage

willingly place yourself under someone else's authority or leadership.⁸ In Chapter Eight we discussed how imitating Christ means we place ourselves under the authority of our leaders. In Chapter Nine we learned that imitating Christ includes submitting to one another. We yield our own desires to others with the help of the Holy Spirit.

The Apostle Paul now turns his attention to wives. Wives, imitate Christ by willingly placing yourselves under your husbands' authority.

Wives, submit to your own husbands,
as to the Lord.

For the husband is the head of the wife
even as Christ is the head of the church,
his body,
and is himself its Savior.

Now as the church submits to Christ,
so also wives should submit in everything to
their husbands. (Eph. 5:22-24)

The Head: Leader

First, let's remember that Christ is the head of the church (v. 23). Just like different body parts in humans make up one body, all the members of Christ's body (believers) make up one body in Christ. Christ functions as the head of that body, or its leader. He

is the church's Savior. Husbands represent Christ in the marriage. Just as Christ functions as the head of the church, so husbands function as the head of the marriage, meaning they function as the leader. Wives should submit to the leadership of their husbands.

Christ: Savior

Note also that Christ is our Savior. He sacrificed his own life to save us from our sins. Therefore, husbands, as leaders, you should willingly sacrifice your desires, and even your own life, if necessary, for your wife. When you sacrifice for her, she finds it easier to submit to your leadership.

Submission to God

God asks nothing more of wives here than he asks of all believers—that they place themselves first under the authority of Christ. As Paul turns his attention to wives, he assumes they already submit to the Lord's authority (v. 22).

Submission to Husbands

Just as you, wives, already submit to the Lord, so you should also submit to your husbands. Verse 24 states the same concept in a slightly different way: just as the *church* submits to Christ, so wives should also submit

to their husbands.

Does Paul tell wives to place themselves under their husbands' authority only if they agree with them? No. Does Paul tell wives to place themselves under their husbands' authority only if their husbands treat them kindly? No. Wives submit to husbands just as all believers submit to the leadership of governing authorities. God placed the governing authority (in this case your husband) over you. Therefore, accept his authority in the same way that you accept the Lord's authority. Romans 13:2 applies here as well: "Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed."

Some women find placing themselves under their husbands' leadership quite easy. Their relationship with their husband flows naturally, and they feel appreciated. Women with natural leadership skills often find submission more difficult. These women need to work harder at yielding to their husbands. Other women may mistakenly believe they must obey an abusive spouse. God's laws tell us not to mistreat or oppress others. If you feel mistreated or oppressed in your marriage and your husband refuses to change, ask your pastor for help.

Following your husband's leadership doesn't make you less important. Accepting his authority doesn't mean

you can't express an opinion. God made you equals. He simply gave husbands the leadership role.

God doesn't tell wives to obey their husband's sinful desires either. Christian women should expect their husbands to imitate Christ in the way they treat them. Insisting that your husband imitate Christ in the way he treats you doesn't break the submission rule. Make sure to imitate Christ in the way you communicate your expectations of him, however.

Applications for Marriage:

"Oh, wow!" Salome exclaimed as they finished reading and talking through Ephesians 5:21-24. "I knew I should submit to God, but I resented submitting to you. I now see that God placed you in leadership over me. By submitting to you, I submit to God. I'm sorry I've been more concerned about my own rights than about obeying God. It's not easy, but I will try to do better."

Assignment: Continue your study of Ephesians 5 together.

1. Ask yourselves if you have placed yourself under Christ's authority. Do you find it hard to submit to Christ? Why or why not?
2. Discuss how your marriage would change if you both imitated Christ by placing yourself

under God's authority.

3. Wife, why might you find it harder to place yourself under your husband's authority than God or an employer?
4. Wife, if you struggle to accept your husband's authority, tell him why. Tell him what he can do to make it easier for you to follow his lead.
5. Wife, ask your husband if he feels you follow his leadership. Ask him to give two examples where he felt you didn't. Listen to him without arguing. Ask his forgiveness if necessary.

Summary: Finding hope in your marriage requires you, wife, to willingly place yourself under your husband's leadership.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Love Your Wife

Ephesians 5:25-31

The Challenge:

“Sweetheart, I don’t think either one of us really understood how a Christian marriage should look,” Pastor Daudi said. “Let’s see what else I need to learn.”

“I can’t wait!” Salome teased.

The Teaching: Husband, Imitate God by Loving your Wife

Chapter Nine teaches us to imitate God as children imitate their fathers. Fathers who cherish their children love them and willingly sacrifice for them. As we turn toward Paul’s instruction for husbands, we must remember that all believers are to imitate God by loving others and sacrificing for them (Eph. 5:1-2).

Love as Christ Loves

In the context of imitating God by walking in love, Paul now turns his attention to husbands.

Husbands, love your wives,
as Christ loved the church and gave himself up
for her,
that he might sanctify her,
having cleansed her by the washing of
water with the word,
so that he might present the church to
himself in splendor,
without spot or wrinkle or any such thing,
that she might be holy and without blemish.
(Eph 5:25-27)

Paul instructs husbands to imitate Christ by loving their wives. In fact, husband, don't just love your wife in a way that feels comfortable to you. Love her in the same way that Christ loves the church (v. 25). Christ loved the church enough to sacrifice his life for her. Husband, then, love your wife enough to willingly sacrifice your life for her.

Love with Purpose

Jesus Christ didn't die on the tree for no reason. He gave up his life for a purpose. His sacrifice purifies the church and makes her holy. He doesn't control her.

Husband, here's the secret to happiness in marriage. Love your wife in a way that makes her trust you and *want* to follow your leadership. If you love your wife as

Christ loves, she will likely want to imitate Christ in the way she submits to you. In that way, your love purifies her and makes her more holy.

Husband, if you love your wife as Christ loves the church, you will not force her to obey or submit to you. You will not force yourself on her sexually. You will desire the best for her and sacrifice your own selfish, sinful desires for her.

When you demand your own way, a woman finds submission especially difficult. Submission comes much easier for a woman who feels cherished and appreciated.

Love as Your Own Body

A man naturally loves his own body and cares for it. Paul says a husband should also love his wife in the same way he loves his own body.

In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies.

He who loves his wife loves himself.

For no one ever hated his own flesh,

but nourishes and cherishes it,

just as Christ does the church,

because we are members of his body.

(Eph. 5:28-30)

Paul tells husbands to love their wives as their own bodies because they are one flesh with their wives. If you nourish and cherish your own body, you should nourish and cherish her body. Remember that God built the woman from the side of the man—"bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh" (Gen. 2:23). By nourishing and cherishing her body, you nourish and cherish your own. Your body is her body in the same way that the church is part of the body of Christ.

Applications for Marriage:

Pastor Daudi sat in his chair speechless as tears rolled down his face. "I have been terribly wrong. I have loved you selfishly instead of loving you the way Christ loves me. He loves me with pure motives because he wants to make me holy. I'm so sorry, Salome. Will you be patient with me while I learn to love you like Jesus loves me?"

Tears ran down Salome's face. "God loves us beautifully. Thank you for wanting to love me like Christ loves us. I will gladly be patient, but I will remind you too sometimes! Please be patient with me as I learn to follow your lead. I struggle to follow anyone's lead, especially when I think I have good ideas myself. Can I ask one favor of you?"

"Oh, boy, what's that?"

“God gave me a good brain, and I like to use it. If I struggle to understand your thinking or if I make suggestions to you, can we talk about our ideas without arguing? I feel unimportant and unloved when you lash out at me.”

“I will try to do better. Thank you for telling me how you feel when I’m harsh.”

Assignment: Study Ephesians 5:25-31 together. Answer the questions below.

1. Who are we to imitate (v. 1)? Why?
2. Why does Ephesians 5 repeat “as Christ loved...and gave himself up for her” two times (vs. 2, 25)?
3. Why did Christ give himself up for the church (vs. 26-27)? How should husbands love their wives?
4. If a husband demands obedience from his wife, how does he accomplish the goals of verses 26 and 27?
5. Husband, evaluate your love for your wife. Do you love her in the same way that Christ loves the church? If not, what needs to change?
6. Husband, ask your wife if she feels you love her with Christ’s love. Ask her to provide two examples when you didn’t love her

like Christ. Listen without arguing. Ask her forgiveness if necessary.

Summary: Finding hope in your marriage requires you, husband, to love your wife like Christ loves the church. You must consider her needs as more important than your own.

Chapter Twelve

Build a Marriage that Preaches

Ephesians 5:31-33

The Challenge:

“There’s more, Salome. We didn’t finish the chapter.

Salome snuggled up next to her husband. “Okay, this is fun! I never knew how much fun marriage could be. I love studying the Scripture together.”

The Teaching: Imitate God by Building a Marriage that Preaches

Hold Fast

Ephesians 5:31 begins with the word “therefore,” meaning the author keeps the rest of the chapter in mind as he sums up his final instruction. Paul quotes Genesis 2:24 here, which we studied briefly in Chapter Three.

“Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife,
and the two shall become one flesh” (Eph. 5: 31).

Because a believing husband imitates God's love for the church by loving his wife, he leaves his parents and holds fast—or clings—to his wife instead of to his parents. His wife becomes his priority over his parents.

Paul begins Ephesians 6 by instructing us to “honor your father and mother” (v.2). Clearly he never intends for us to break off our relationship with parents when he says to leave father and mother. He simply means that when we marry we no longer cling to our parents. Parents may still advise us, but to accomplish becoming one in mind, body, soul, and spirit with our spouse, we must cling to one another as the church clings to the Father.

The Mystery

Paul marvels at a marriage that reflects Christ's love. It's remarkable and mysterious.

This mystery is profound,
and I am saying that it refers to Christ and
the church. (Eph. 5:32)

Christ's love for his church illustrates a more important teaching than marriage between a man and a woman. We don't look at our marriages to understand Christ's love. Instead, we look at Christ's sacrificial love for the church to understand God's mysterious plan for

incredible marriages. Then our ability to show Christ-like love for our spouses draws others to him.

Respect

When a husband imitates Christ's love and walks by the Spirit, he loves his wife intensely, and his wife responds with respect. A wife who feels God's intense love through her husband should respond with respect—or admiration—for him.

However, let each one of you love his wife
as himself,
and let the wife see that she respects her husband.
(Eph. 5:33)

There are two commands here, though. Husband, love your wife and wife, make sure you respect your husband. Both actions come easier when each person obeys his or her command, but neither command is dependent on the other one. Each person is to obey the command whether or not the spouse obeys his or her own command.

Ultimate Goal: The Salvation of Others

Ultimately, this kind of love preaches a wordless sermon to others. If we show the same kind of love to our spouses that Christ shows us, non-believers

will want what they see in us. This concept mirrors what we learned from John 17 in Chapter Three. God purposes not merely to give us happiness but to show others God's amazing love through our marriages. Nonbelievers should expect believers to love each other so well that they want what we have.

Applications for Marriage:

“Salome, can you imagine our marriage reflecting how much God loves us? I’m not sure I ever understood how much God loves us even though I knew Christ died for my sin.”

“How can we better reflect God’s love through our marriage, Daudi?”

“Here’s one thought. We’ve been relying on our own human strength to lead our church. We’ve been selfish in our marriage. Let’s ask God to help us learn to walk in the Spirit so we can imitate God’s love in our ministry and in our marriage.”

“That sounds like a great start.”

“Let’s pray together. In fact, let’s start praying together about our church, our ministry, and our marriage every day. I hope to see nonbelievers and believers want a marriage like ours. I’m excited to see what God will

do.” Pastor Daudi bowed his head to pray.

Assignment: Study Ephesians 5:31-33. Answer the following questions:

1. Are you independent from your parents? If so, do you still respect and honor them?
2. Why is clinging to your wife and becoming one flesh so important? (Review Eph. 5:28-30 in Chapter 11).
3. Discuss specific ways your marriage can reflect God’s deep love.
4. Do people in your church and nonbelievers notice the beauty of your marriage? Do you model a healthy marriage for your children? If not, what needs to change?
5. Pastor, your marriage provides the best illustration of the “good news” of Jesus. Do you work harder on preparing sermons or building your marriage? Do you need to reorder your priorities?

Summary: The love expressed through your marriage shows nonbelievers how much Christ loves his church.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Follow Him and Understand Her

1 Peter 3:1-9

The Challenge:

“Salome, I found another passage on the topic of marriage as I searched the Scriptures. It looks like we still need to learn more. Let’s study this together.”

“Daudi, what have you done with my husband? You are a new man lately who wants to serve me and search the Scriptures to learn more about how God wants us to live. I love this new you!”

“I mess up some days, though.”

“I know. You are really trying. I appreciate how we are talking about these things and agreeing on changes together. I know some of our conversations have been difficult. Thank you for hanging in there with me.”

The Teaching: Follow Him and Understand Her

1 Peter 3 lists desirable behavior for wives, husbands, and all believers. Some of the teaching repeats

instruction from Paul (Eph. 5:21-31), but Peter gives deeper reasons to follow God's plan for success in marriage. Devastating consequences can come from not following God's instruction.

Wives

Peter tells wives to submit, not to give husbands power over them, but to win them to Christ. A husband who doesn't love God can turn to God simply by watching his wife behave in a considerate and wholesome manner. A husband who believes in God may feel challenged to walk more closely with God because of his wife's behavior. As a wife, knowing that my behavior can make a difference to my husband's faith should challenge me to obey God's direction.

Likewise, **wives**,
submit to your own husbands,
so that
even if some do not obey the word,
they may be won without a word by the conduct of
their wives,
when they see your respectful and pure conduct.

I love the use of words here: those who don't obey God's Word can be won without a word. In other words, your behavior holds power to change lives just as we learned that a loving marriage can.

Do not let your adorning be external
—the braiding of hair
and the putting on of gold jewelry,
or the clothing you wear—
but let your adorning be the hidden person of
the heart
with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and
quiet spirit,
which in God's sight is very precious.
For this is how the holy women who hoped in God
used to adorn themselves,
by submitting to their own husbands,
as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord.
And you are her children,
if you do good and do not fear anything that is
frightening. (1 Peter 3:3-6)

Peter uses clothing to better explain “respectful and pure conduct.” Outward beauty won’t turn your husband around, but inner beauty may. Therefore, let your beauty not come from how you decorate yourself on the outside, but from how you prioritize making yourself beautiful on the inside. God sees the beauty that comes from a peaceful and sweet spirit as something to cherish. Inner beauty never fades.

Peter doesn’t tell women not to look beautiful on the outside. He simply makes the point that how you dress your inside matters more than what you wear on the

outside. Your inner beauty makes a greater impact on the world around you, including your husband's faith.

Peter next gives examples of "holy women" whose behavior shows inner beauty (v. 5). He references "holy women of old," including Sarah from the Old Testament (Gen. 17:15). Sarah put her hope in God and decorated herself with respect and reverence for her husband. Peter reminds us that to hope in God means to "do good" by showing respect to your husband and by adorning yourself with kindness and peace. Also, trust God with the things that scare you, including whether you will ever see improvement in your marriage or change in your husband.

Husbands

Peter now warns husbands that how they treat their wives affects their prayer life.

Likewise, **husbands**,
live with your wives in an understanding way,
showing honor to the woman as the
weaker vessel,
since they are heirs with you of the grace of life
so *that*
your prayers may not be hindered. (1 Peter 1:7,
emphasis mine)

Because you both belong to God's family and therefore experience his lovingkindness, show your wife compassion and understanding in how you treat her. This verse does not say you are the leader so you can dominate and control your wife. It does not say your wife is inferior to you. Instead, the verse says your wife is delicate and precious. Show her honor and treat her with kindness and compassion because God gave her to you as a precious gift.

The words "live with your wife in an understanding way" in the original language likely includes the sexual relationship. Showing your wife honor as the weaker vessel considers her sexual needs and not just your own. Physically, men tend to be much stronger than women. Sexually, a woman's body is very tender. If you force yourself on her sexually, you will hurt her. God designed women that way. He wants men to treat their wives with kindness and gentleness, honoring and understanding even her sexual needs.

Peter leaves a strong warning to husbands in verse 7. If you dominate and control your wife as if you are superior to her, your prayers will go unanswered. If nothing else changes your behavior, let the threat of unanswered prayer cause you to treat your wife with love and kindness.

All of You

We've already learned that all believers should strive for oneness in the body of Christ just as husbands and wives should strive for oneness in their marriages. Peter repeats this truth here, but again for a deeper purpose.

Finally, **all of you**,

have unity of

- mind
- sympathy
- brotherly love
- a tender heart
- and a humble mind.

Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for
reviling (insulting or despising),

but on the contrary, bless,

for to this you were called,

so that

you may obtain a blessing (1 Peter 3:8-9,
emphasis mine).

Strive for oneness in how you think and in how you show compassion, love, tenderness, and humility. Don't respond to evil with evil or with insults to insults. Instead, bless each other so that you will not miss out on God's blessings.

In your marriage, seek to avoid responding to your spouse's hurtful comments with hurtful comments. Husband, take the lead in calming a disagreement before it surges into a battle. You can choose to stop an argument if *you* stop arguing.

In summary:

1. Wife, show respect to your husband. Submit to his authority and adorn yourself with kindness and holiness. Show him that your hope comes from the Lord to win him to the Lord.
2. Husband, treat your wife with tenderness and compassion to receive answers to your prayers.
3. All believers, strive to bless others and live in harmony to receive God's blessing.

If we don't follow these guidelines, we will miss out on God's blessings individually and in our marriages.

Applications for Marriage:

"Oh, wow! I didn't know my behavior toward you affects my prayer life," Pastor Daudi exclaimed. "If I don't live with you in an understanding way, God won't answer my prayers. That's serious!"

“And I didn’t know that my respectful submission is what can change your attitude and even win you over to Christ,” Salome added.

Salome and Daudi looked at each other in disbelief.

“No wonder we struggled in our marriage! We had it all wrong.”

“I owe you and the congregation an apology,” Pastor Daudi exclaimed. “All believers, including you and me, must choose to behave as one in the way we think and in the way we love. We should show compassion to others and remain humble.”

Daudi paused to think before continuing. “I’ve been proud. I’ve been a dictator, not a leader that others want to follow. No wonder we haven’t experienced blessings in our ministry or in our marriage. Salome, will you pray for me to reflect God’s love as a kind husband and pastor?”

Excitement shone on Salome’s face. “Of course I will. God has already worked in your heart. You are already more of a godly man than you realize. Can we pray together often about these things?”

Assignment: Study 1 Peter 3:1-9 together and discuss the following questions:

1. Why should a woman submit to her unbelieving husband (v. 2)? Why should she submit to her believing husband (v. 5)?
2. What kind of clothing does Peter say we should strive for and why (vs. 3-4)? Wife, do you give more thought to what you wear than to how you act? Ask your husband if he feels you behave in a gentle or bossy way. Listen without arguing. Ask forgiveness if necessary.
3. Why does Peter say husbands should live with their wives in an understanding way (v.7)? Husband, ask your wife if she feels you understand her generally. Then ask if she feels you understand her sexual needs. Do you listen to her, celebrate her strengths, and know what's important to her? Ask her to suggest two ways you can improve. Listen without arguing. Ask forgiveness if necessary.
4. How would your marriage look different if you responded to one another with blessing and a tender heart instead of with argument (vs. 8-9)?

Summary:

Finding hope in your marriage requires the following:

- Wife—follow your husband's leadership and "dress" yourself with kindness.
- Husband—understand your wife and treat

her like a priceless gift.

- Couples—respond to each other with blessings instead of arguments.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Serve Like Jesus

John 13:1-17

The Challenge:

Babu Howard and Bibi Fran came to a new village to teach a conference on the topic of marriage. After days of teaching from the Bible about God's plan for marriage, Howard suggested the men at the conference wash their wives' feet. The men gasped in horror! The women giggled with excitement.

"In our culture, wives serve men," Solomon laughed.
"We would never stoop to wash our wives' feet!"

"What if the Scriptures teach that you should wash her feet?" Howard challenged.

"Well, I don't believe the Scriptures would do that, but we have been surprised by what we learned this week. Okay, show us from the Scripture and we'll consider it."

The Teaching: Serve Like Jesus

Jesus gives us the first example of washing others' feet. As the time approaches his death, he invites his

Hope for Marriage

followers to a big feast. They eat until they feel satisfied. They enjoy Jesus's company, but Jesus also talks about some hard times coming when some of his followers will deny him. Then Jesus does something remarkable.

Jesus...laid aside his outer garments,
and taking a towel,
tied it around his waist.
Then he poured water into a basin
and began to wash the disciples' feet
and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped
around him...

When he had washed their feet
and put on his outer garments
and resumed his place,
he said to them,

“Do you understand what I have done to you?
You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are
right, for so I am.

If I then, your Lord and Teacher,
have washed your feet,
you also ought to wash one another's feet.
For I have given you an example,
that you also should do just as I have done
to you....

Truly, truly, I say to you,
a servant is not greater than his master,
nor is a messenger greater than the one who

sent him.
If you know these things, blessed are you if you
do them.” (John 13:4-5, 12-17)

Jesus Serves

Jesus, the leader whom his followers call Teacher and Lord, becomes a servant. Instead of expecting his followers to serve him, he stoops to serve them. He lays aside his outer garments, ties a towel around his waist, pours water into a basin, and goes from follower to follower, washing their feet.

Simon Peter refuses to let Jesus wash his feet.

“You shall never wash my feet,” Peter insists (v.8).

“If I do not wash you, you have no share with me,” Jesus responds (v. 8).

Peter’s understanding of Jesus’s words changes his heart. “Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head,” he exclaims (v. 9). Peter doesn’t want to see Jesus in a servant’s role, but Jesus serves him to show how his followers should serve others. Peter accepts Jesus’s service because he wants his Lord’s full blessing.

Spiritual Cleansing

Jesus expresses an even deeper meaning in v. 8 when he tells Peter, “If I do not wash you, you have no share with me.” Jesus’ death on the tree offers complete cleansing from sin. Peter had already experienced full cleansing, or forgiveness, from his sins. He not only needed cleansing for today’s journey physically, but for today’s sin spiritually.

Peter needed to recognize and accept Jesus’ full forgiveness from his sins to experience relationship with him. Jesus’s washing of Peter’s feet teaches three things:

1. Those who trust Jesus are completely cleansed and forgiven from all sins.
2. We need to experience forgiveness from the grime of each day’s journey.
3. Leaders should serve others like Jesus did.

Jesus Humbles Himself

Jesus asks his followers if they understand why he washed their feet. He explains, “If I, your Teacher and Lord, can humble myself to wash your feet, you should humble yourselves to wash each other’s feet” (v. 13-14). Jesus demonstrates humility by washing the feet of his followers. He instructs his followers to follow his

example by serving one another in the same way.

God's Blessing

Finally, Jesus summarizes his teaching: If you humble yourselves to serve, you will receive blessing. If you don't humble yourselves to serve, you may miss out on God's blessing.

Service in Marriage

In the context of marriage, certainly we should serve one another. Jesus shows us that serving for the purpose of receiving God's blessing works as an acceptable reason to serve. If we take Jesus's words literally, that means we should literally wash each other's feet. And, to take his words even more literally, the leader—the man—should humble himself to serve his wife by washing her feet.

When Jesus lived on earth, people wore sandals on their feet. They walked everywhere they went, which made their feet dirty. Homeowners provided a bowl of water for guests to wash their own feet when they came to visit. At times, though, the servant in the home would wash the feet of the guest. Jesus, the host of the meal, stooped to wash the feet of his followers, something no homeowner would ever have done.

Humble Yourself

Imagine the joy your wife would feel if you humbled yourself to wash her feet when she arrives home from a dusty walk. Imagine if you wash her feet instead of expecting her to serve you.

Or perhaps she arrives home tired, and you serve her by fixing food for the family or giving her another kind of break. Blessing comes from serving others, especially your spouse. When you surprise your wife by serving her, she feels happy. She often responds by wanting to serve you in return. She may choose to fix you a nice meal, and she may feel more willing to participate in intimacy.

Humility and service to one another go a long way to improving a strained relationship.

Applications for Marriage:

“Man, Howard, you constantly convict us!”

“I’m just the messenger. This is God’s Word to us. We need to listen to God’s Word and change our behavior, if necessary.”

Fran chuckled with a twinkle in her eye, “So, men, do you want to know the key to happiness in marriage?”

“Yes!”

“Love, serve, sacrifice for, and live with your wife in an understanding way. If you do that, she will do just about anything for you.”

“Amen to that!” the wives chimed in.

“It really goes both ways, husbands and wives. When both man and wife follow God’s direction for how they treat one another, everything changes,” Fran reminded.

“Just keep one thing in mind,” Howard cautioned. “Follow God’s Word out of love and devotion to God, not just to get what you want in your marriage.”

Assignment: Study John 13:4-17 together. Consider the following:

1. Why did Jesus humble himself to serve his disciples (vs. 14-15)?
2. If Jesus served his disciples as an example for them to follow, what did Jesus intend for them to do?
3. If Jesus wanted his disciples to follow his lead, what does he want us (his disciples) to do?
4. Husband, consider humbling yourself to wash your wife’s feet. Think about the cleansing and forgiveness that Jesus offered Peter.

While washing your wife's feet, tell her the following:

- a. Jesus has forgiven all of your sin against him.
 - b. I forgive all your sin against me.
 - c. I am your servant.
5. According to these verses, does Jesus intend for his followers to only wash the feet of others? Does he want his followers to humble themselves to serve believers in other ways?
 6. Husband, as the leader of your home, ask your wife how you can serve her in in other ways.
 7. Wife, ask your husband how you can serve him in return. How can you serve your family in other ways?

Summary: Finding hope in your marriage requires humbling yourselves to serve each other like Jesus served his disciples.

Conclusion

In most of the stories in this book, couples worked out their problems. I wanted to show examples of healthy ways to communicate through difficult discussions. I recognize that all problems don't easily work themselves out.

It takes two willing people who seek God's direction to work through problems. If you can't work through the assignments without too much fighting, ask your pastor or someone you trust to walk through the assignments with you.

Keep in mind that learning to work together in marriage takes time and continued effort. Keep working at your marriage while constantly asking the Lord for help. Persist with a willingness to learn and grow.

I hope you will use this book to help others work through problems in their marriages as well. You can study one chapter at a time with them, asking questions from Scripture and leading them through the assignments.

You can experience hope in your marriage. All marriages can thrive if both husband and wife

willingly submit to God's plan and purposely work together. When one person refuses to follow God's direction, marriage can feel very difficult. If your problems feel too overwhelming, keep asking God for wisdom, and do your part to follow God's direction.

I pray that you will experience true healing and that others will come to know Christ because of the love they see in your marriage.

Endnotes

¹ <https://www.focusonthefamily.com/marriage/what-is-the-actual-divorce-rate/>

² *ABH Bible for Learning, God's Perfect World: Genesis 1 & 2*, ABH, page 20

³ *ABH Bible for Learning, God's Perfect World: Genesis 1 & 2*, ABH, page 61

⁴ *ABH Bible for Learning, God's Perfect World: Genesis 1 & 2*, ABH, page 128

⁵ <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/us/definition/english/sensuality>

⁶ See notes on Romans 13 at <https://abhbooks.com/study-materials/>.

⁷ See notes on Romans 13 at <https://abhbooks.com/study-materials/>.

⁸ See notes on Romans 13 at <https://abhbooks.com/study-materials/>.

