

Chapter 1: A Happy Marriage Is Possible

I remember the emotional rush I felt the night that my husband proposed to me. He picked me up and took me to a fancy steakhouse. I was all dressed up and he studied me from head to toe. He was attentive to every detail of the evening. The car was detailed, the temperature in the car was spot-on, and he even visited the restaurant in advance to pick the perfect table for us. During dinner, he was so concerned with me being satisfied that I felt he didn't get to enjoy his meal. After dinner, we walked down a spiral staircase as he held my hand. On the street in front of us was a beautiful white horse and carriage waiting for us. It was a chilly evening, so he draped me with a blanket. The ride was perfectly romantic. When we crossed the halfway point of a lit bridge in downtown Columbus, Ohio, the carriage stopped. My husband got out of the carriage and got on his knees to propose. I said yes! The excitement on his face was priceless, and the passion in his eyes said, "I love you," without words. We talked about how we hoped that what we felt that night would never end.

We meet with couples all the time with similar stories; however, somewhere along the way, these couples let passion die. There is no more excitement; their relationship becomes predictable – some would even call it stale. Your chances of divorce are about fifty percent, but you never imagined that you would find yourself in this category. You know that there is something special hidden in your marriage and for some reason you can't quit. My husband and I coach couples every week and I sometimes wonder why some of them are still together. Some couples say things such as they have invested a lot of time and money in their marriage. The reason why a bad marriage is still intact is because someone won't quit.

We spoke to a wife who said that even though her relationship was strained, they made it through so many challenges that she didn't want to quit and start over. She mentioned how her heart hurt when she saw another couple operating in unity. She wondered what she was doing wrong in her relationship that she didn't have the emotional connection that she only dreamed of. The frustration of it all can be numbing. The loneliness of being single is hard but the loneliness of being married and alone is a tragedy. What's worse is that by being that example for your children, the cycle repeats for the next generation.

It was your expectation to marry your spouse and you both would be one another's emotional support through everything. That is totally a realistic expectation. As a parent, it is an expectation that I would be providing a place that is nurturing – a place that would offer emotional

support for my child. In the same way, a marriage has a purpose and should meet the needs of having a life partner who would love you, care for you, and support you through whatever life throws at you. Your spouse should be your greatest confidant. A satisfying relationship is one that provides protection, attention, affection, and a connection. When these things are missing, it leaves one feeling empty, isolated, and lonely. You may say that it would be better to be alone.

Once, my husband and I met with a couple and at every session the wife cried. She said how she just needed to be loved. Out of frustration, the husband stated that he didn't know what that meant. He said that he did love her, so he wanted to know what else he could do. What his wife was saying was that she needed to *feel* emotionally connected to him. She needed him to meet her emotional needs. When she was hurting, she wanted her husband to feel her pain with her and to help her navigate through all the brokenness. When she was happy, she wanted him to celebrate with her. She often wondered if he even thought of her at all during the day. The desire to be satisfied in her relationship was all-consuming. They were desperate and they hoped and prayed that we would be able to bring clarity to their situation. If you have ever felt like you and your spouse were not on the same page, I am here to share all the tips I have learned to achieve a healthy and happy marriage.

Chapter 2: Walking through the Process

My husband and I have now been married for twenty-seven years and raised six sons. My husband is quite the romantic and is attentive towards me. When we got married, it was his greatest desire to spoil a wife. I knew that I had hit the jackpot, because who wouldn't want a husband who would treat them as a gift from God? Even though I knew that I wanted and needed that, I still had a hard time accepting and reciprocating, it went on for probably eight years. While away from my husband, I thought of him and all the wonderful things he would do and say to me. On my way home, I was eager to get home. Once I walked in the door, I looked at him, a smile on his face. He was always so excited to see me. I said hello, but sometimes seemed annoyed that he wanted a hug; a kiss even more annoying. I knew that it was taking him for granted, but I just didn't have the feelings to give him anything more.

My husband warned me of the dangers of allowing our relationship to get stale early on into our marriage. He had a deep desire for his heart to feel connected to mine. He looked at me with the same love and passion that he did when he proposed to me. I reminded myself of how good that felt and how I said that I wanted to always have that. It saddened me that my deserving spouse couldn't get what he needed from me. I prayed to God to help me, because I wanted to change. I imagined him passing away and how I would feel if he found someone else to fulfill that desire. I would be devastated. What I had was a dream come true, but for some reason I was afraid to accept that it was my reality. I think that part of why I wouldn't open my heart was because this dream could end – what a tragedy. Most couples never arrive at a high level of unity

Where we are in our relationship didn't just happen; it was truly intentional work. I knew where I wanted to be in our relationship, and I knew that where we were was not it. I had to surrender my heart for change. Once I started those small steps toward greater unity, the emotions began to increase towards my husband. It was a vulnerable place, but I decided to take a risk that has proven to be worth it all.

I saw good marriages, but none like what my husband aspired to have. I told him that what he was looking for could only be found in fairy tales. My husband believed that he knew the key that would bring change to our relationship, and that is found in 1 Corinthians 13:8, New King James Version (NKJV), reading, "Love never fails..."

"And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love."

– 1 Corinthians 13: 13 (NKJV)

One day, we were lying in bed having pillow talk. My husband began to share how he desired to feel close emotionally. I have to be honest; I had no clue what he was talking about. I knew that I didn't have the feelings that he had, and I had no clue how to get them. It was as if I was disconnected from my emotions. He made a statement that night that I will never forget, saying that I would become exactly what he needed because he was committed to loving me. I didn't understand what he meant, but it really happened. It didn't happen overnight, but he kept giving me what he needed. His great desire was for me to not just love him but to be in love with him. He poured his love on me in ways that any woman would desire. He taught me how to love by being the example.

“Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it springs the issues of life.”

– Proverbs 4: 23 (NKJV)

I had been hurt, as are a lot of people. My husband explained how he dreamed of a wife who would fulfill his dreams of being married to his best friend and lover. He was the kindest man I had ever encountered. When I returned home from work after a long twelve-hour shift at the hospital, he waited for me to assist me in getting out of my car. He grabbed my purse, helped me undress, and then he would massage me until I went to sleep. If I was hurting in my body, he would pray for me, even if it was in the middle of the night. If I made a mistake about something, I would tell him about it and he never judged me. He told people that he loved me because God favored him by giving him a wife.

“He who finds a wife finds a good thing and obtains favor from the LORD.”

– Proverbs 18: 22 (NKJV)

He would say that he is supposed to care for the gift that God gave. I began to notice that even though I had not been able to fully give my heart to my husband as he had to me, I enjoyed his heart. I began to pray and ask God to teach me how to love, and because he was my friend, I was able to share how I struggled in that area and that I needed to change but didn't know how. My husband never criticized or threw it back in my face. He, without a doubt, loves me. Many people say that they love one another, but there is no fruit of it.

“Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.”

– 1 Corinthians 13: 4-7, New International Version (NIV)

As I read this passage, I could see how my husband won me over. He was kind to me; he was always thinking of me. He never went to work without calling to find out how my day was going. He sent me songs that he heard on the radio that reminded him of me. He did not envy. He was so proud of me and my accomplishments. He told people how smart I am and how he was proud to call me his wife.

Over the years, we grew in our intimacies, not just sexually, but in our love and connection with one another. My husband has always been an open book. If he is feeling an overwhelming feeling of love for me, he doesn't keep it to himself; he tells me. It is the most assuring feeling that he has eyes for me and no one else. If he reaches for my hand while walking through the mall just because he wants to feel close to me, he does. It was his persistent display of love for me that caused me to want to change. I felt that he deserved to have the desires of his heart, since he had given me the desires of mine.

We truly became best friends. I miss him when he is away, and I am now able to say it to him. He proved that I could trust him with my heart. Instead of taking advantage of my vulnerability, he protects and enjoys it. There are times when we lay in bed and simply share how much we appreciate one another. After twenty-eight years of marriage, we still have an amazing connection and it feels so good. I am so thankful for a husband who wouldn't settle for a basic union. He fought for us; what a gift to give to our children. Our children know what a great marriage should look like, and I want them to know that they can have a great marriage too. I have found that most marriages never achieve the level of intimacy that I describe.

A great marriage is not an unrealistic expectation. Having a mate who you are so in tune with is not just for the movies. All of what you felt on your wedding night doesn't have to go away. In fact, it should be better. People used to tease us because we showed affection towards one another. I realized that the criticism was because most people didn't have any idea how to create a beautiful and satisfying marriage. They would say that we were over the top. We simply started discovering the tools that we needed to have a great marriage, and knowing what tools are missing in your toolbox helps build a great relationship.

I think of love as a seed and marriage as a garden. Once that seed of love is planted after the wedding, you must now start to water the seeds in your garden. Many couples get stuck right there. One year, we planted a large garden. My husband was a little overzealous in planting it. He

and I were working so many hours that we didn't have time to check what was growing in it. By the time we made it out there, there were so many weeds that it was hard to tell the difference between the plants and the weeds. We tried to save what we could but wound up plowing most of the garden.

The following year, we planted a much smaller garden. Together we attended to it every day and it was beautiful and full of fruits and vegetables. It was so full that we had plenty to share. One day, as we were pulling in our crops, my husband mentioned this analogy. He said that our marriage was a garden. If it isn't cared for, the weeds will grow. Weeds in a marriage are anything that would try to kill it. It could be other people, too much attention to hobbies, work, or TV or social media, to name a few. The act of planting seeds alone wasn't good enough; the garden needed water, sun, and fertilizer. Just getting married is only the beginning.

As with the garden, it took us both to keep it clean; it took teamwork. Over the years, we've heard many husbands say that they want to lead their families. Husbands say they want a wife who is submissive to him. I firmly believe that women want a leader, but no one wants a leader who is a poor leader. A good leader is not one who dictates; instead, a good leader is one who protects his wife and family. In Ephesians 5:22-24(KJV), the scripture says, "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the savior of the body. Therefore, as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything."

Men have used this scripture to try to get their wives to be submissive for centuries. If a man understood what this passage meant and operated in, then husbands would have little to no problem getting his wife to let him lead. People like good leaders. Good leaders seek wise counsel. Good leaders work together with the team toward a common goal. When a husband makes decisions based on the Word and lives according to the wisdom of God, a wife is more willing to follow him. It does not mean that his wife has no voice and that her ideas are not to be valued. Successful leaders want to consider the opinions of their teams.

Women must have love to thrive; it is the main ingredient of our dish. I have always been satisfied with my husband because he has always worked hard to find out how I needed to be loved. There were certainly other areas that we needed to improve upon, but the love part – he understood that. I don't know one woman who won't tell you that her greatest need is love. We have coached couples from the rich to poor and the wives all want the same thing – love. When

we first got married, we each had custody of a son. That same year, we got pregnant with our first child together and my husband's other son, who was only three, also came to live with us. In less than two years, I had gone from one child to four. There were many times when I wondered "what the heck did I get myself into?" But I never thought to bail out. My husband wasn't wealthy; he wasn't a CEO of some big corporation. He was a boiler operator at the time, yet I felt wealthy and I knew that I was the envy of many women, simply because he loved me. People would say how they could tell that I was loved by the way he looked at me and the way he paid attention to my needs. He understood that in order for him to get what he needed, he first had to get me in a place that I could give back. You, too, will understand these principles and how to apply them.

I used to manage several medical clinics. My boss and I didn't see eye to eye, and it was a difficult time for me. I was at home, lying on my bed, when my husband came home. I could hear him rushing to get his work boots off to come check on me. He came into the room and laid next to me in bed and gently asked if I was okay. He knew that I was upset about the situation. He shared my pain and desired to be with me. He left the landscaping job that he was working on just to love me through it all. I will never forget the emotional connection I felt that day. My husband wept with me and said that it pained him to see me hurt. He could have said to suck it up and move on, but instead, he grieved with me. After the storm blew over, he rejoiced with me in that as well. My husband was there with me, from beginning to end. It was like he added fertilizer to our garden. The whole experience took our relationship to a new level of intimacy. Being willing to share in everything caused me to bond with him more. He proved that I could trust him and that he wanted to not only be my husband, but also my friend. You will know how to fulfill the need for deep emotional connection in the chapters to come.

Early on, my greatest fear in our relationship was having my heart hurt. A broken heart is such a deep wound that affects everyone on a physical, emotional, and spiritual level. When my first husband cheated on me, I was so deeply hurt and the fear of it held me back from letting my new husband into my heart. My husband understood what I felt because he too had been hurt. The scripture does tell us to guard our hearts and God expects us to be faithful in doing so. A guard is intended to keep bad things out and to only let good things in. A broken heart will cause one to see things through a dirty lens. My husband knew that I had a hang-up there, so he would always bring it to my attention when he saw it happening. When we first got married, I couldn't cry about anything. I didn't even cry at my mother's funeral and I was the one officiating it. I was tired of

crying over life and I decided somewhere along the way that I wasn't doing it anymore. I was so hard, and my husband would say that I didn't need to be. I wanted to be soft towards him, and with his help, I learned how to be. Later, we will discuss the process that led me to a place of a softened heart.

Couples asked us to write a book on sex for years and it is one of our endeavors because sex in marriage should be as easy to discuss as communication. Sometimes, couples come to us because they are not satisfied in the bedroom. We never start there when coaching, because that's not where the issues usually originate. Our sex life is better than it has ever been because we cleaned up so many other areas in our relationship.

Let's return to the idea of the garden; a well-kept garden yields a great harvest and the main thing that happened is the fact that you kept it free of weeds. Sex in marriage is similar. Once we started to attend to the other areas discussed in this chapter, sex became easy. I love performing for my husband because he loves me and isn't afraid to show it. We have put in the work to protect love and connect emotionally. Keeping the weeds out is key to great sex. A while back, there was a couple that came to us because they hadn't had sex in over two years. The wife hoped that we would convince her husband that he needed to make love to her. It is not normal for a husband and wife to not desire one another. Usually, there are some weeds to be discovered. It wasn't long before the weeds were revealed. The husband was having an affair and had been looking at pornography when his wife was at work, and sometimes on his phone while he slept next to her. These were weeds in the garden. We will discuss techniques that will help kill the weeds and the way to create the perfect environment for love and romance.

We found that money in marriage has been a point of contention for many couples. One or both partners don't want to give up that control, so many couples don't have a budget set up. We worked with a couple that had been married for sixteen years and had never established a budget. The husband was embarrassed by how much less he made than his wife, so it was easier for him to avoid the conversation. Because the husband never took part in simply knowing what their bills were, his wife became resentful. It was as if the husband and wife were in two separate boats, going in opposite directions.

In the last chapter of the book, we lay out an easy budget plan that will help you to arrive at your financial goals. Our plan was laid out to a young couple about six months ago and they discovered that there was over \$600 extra in their budget that they didn't know was there. Our

budget plan is simple, but still provides freedom to enjoy some of the fruits of your labor. There will be no need to fight over money matters.

Chapter 3: How to Have a Better Marriage

Most couples don't think of marriage as a business arrangement, but it is. A successful business doesn't just happen; it takes strategic planning and assessments. I worked for the top five largest health care organizations in the U.S. There were weekly meetings, new strategies, surveys, data analysis, budget meetings, and evaluations. If we found that our actions were not leading us in a direction of success, there were changes quickly made. In our strategic meetings, we would all gather around a huge whiteboard, acknowledge the problem, and then strategize together until we found an acceptable solution. We didn't always agree on everything, but when the focus was on solving our problem, we could at least agree to that as a goal. The meetings we had were an attempt to gain wisdom, which is the ability to recognize good and bad choices. When we were not successful in an area, that meant there was something that we didn't know or understand.

In the same way, never stop learning how to better your marriage. It is the most important ingredient to its success. We always ask couples on their first visit with us, "What do you want for your marriage?" Secondly, we ask, "What are you doing to get there?"

"The beginning of wisdom is this: Get wisdom. Though it cost all you have, get understanding."

– Proverbs 4:7-27(NIV)

Many of the couples that come to us say they don't spend much time with one another because they simply don't have time. What would happen if a company owner never spent time with his company? It would more than likely fail. Someone has to attend to it. The company that I worked for sent the leaders to seminars and conferences regularly. The purpose was to simply provide us with wisdom to make good decisions for the company.

My husband and I recently completed a group session with ten couples. One of the men in the group didn't want to attend; he only agreed to come because his wife was asking to come to our private sessions and that was just out of the question. He felt that he could be a bit more unnoticed in a group. Because I spoke to the wife, I knew that her husband wanted to paint a picture of a perfect marriage. She, on the other hand, was quite transparent. She spoke of how she wanted to feel more connected with her husband and wished that they could communicate with one another without it erupting into an argument. They were married for nearly twenty years and her frustrations were only growing. She made her needs clear to her husband and he would respond with, "What do you want me to do?" We were able to get through the weeds of their garden by walking them through the process of recognizing each other's needs and how to meet them. We

taught them the exercise of mirroring. The wife expressed her frustrations and desires. The husband then relayed what he thought he heard back. In this case, the wife had expressed that it made her angry when her husband would criticize her in front of others. The husband knew that the wife didn't appreciate his comments, but he had never heard why.

As part of the exercise, she shared how this made her feel. She said that she felt unprotected and devalued when he caused others to laugh at her. When the husband mirrored what he heard, he wept. He said, "You don't like it when I joke about you because it makes you feel like I betray you and don't protect your feelings. As a husband, you feel that I should honor you and I agree." After clearing his throat, he took her hand, looked her in the eyes, and said, "I am so sorry that I made you feel this way." The next week, they returned with a report that they had never felt more connected.

In cases like these, wisdom is missing. Whenever there is unresolved conflict, you must be willing to discuss it and to get help from a trusted friend or from someone like us. We worked with another couple and after they completed their sessions, I asked the wife if she would recommend coaching to her friends. Her response was, "Now!" She felt that if a spouse was already thinking about coaching, then they already need it. If you didn't need it, there would be no need to even think about it. Getting understanding may cost you, but it is well worth it. You are worth it!

"Cherish her, and she will exalt you; embrace her, and she will honor you."

– Proverbs 4:8 New International Version (NIV)

In this verse, wisdom is referred to as "her." Wisdom will honor you and embrace you. After about three years in our marriage, my husband decided that he wanted to start a family landscaping business. Fast forward, and we fell on our faces by not first having a business plan in place. We made lots of money and gained new clients daily. However, we had no idea how to file taxes nor did we know how much to set aside for them. We owed more than what we were ready for, all because we didn't gain wisdom prior to starting. Had we gotten wisdom on starting a business first, we would have been successful, which is what it means for wisdom to exalt and honor you. Couples should always look for ways to add more wisdom to their relationships. Going to an annual marriage conference, reading books, or watching videos would help. Learning how to be successful in marriage by always being willing to learn, grow, and make adjustments is wisdom in practice and it will exalt and honor you with success in your relationship. Just remember, you don't know everything.

“I’ve learned that I still have a lot to learn.”

– Maya Angelou

Marriage is ministry. You are to build each other up so that you are both raised to a greater level. Your marriage should be your priority, not your service to your church, job, parents, or friends. If you invest in your marriage, so many other aspects of your life will fall into place. Unity in marriage doesn’t just happen; it has to be created.

“Learn to do right...”

– Isaiah 1:17 (NIV)

Wisdom is the difference between success and failure. Always seek out tools that you can use to allow for positive growth. When you are at the point that you don’t have the marriage that you want, or if there is always conflict between you and your spouse, you need to seek the wisdom of God. In Proverbs 16:7, the Bible says that God will make even your enemies be at peace with you when your ways please the Lord.

God is pleased when you are seeking him and when you rely on Him to help you in your marriage. When you are in conflict with your spouse, you are not working together, but rather against one another. An enemy is defined as a person who is in opposition to one another. We often remind couples that they will implode upon themselves if they don’t recognize when they transition to the level of enemies. A house divided will not stand, and there should only be three voices in your marriage – husband, wife, and God.

Ecclesiastes 4:12 reads, “a threefold cord is not quickly broken.” Your cord should never include another strand. When we got married, my husband and I understood that as much as we love our children and extended family, we desired to protect our love. There are always enemies to marriage. We met with a couple who came to us because they began arguing more than usual. I asked if there were any changes that had taken place in their lives, and the wife said that their adult son had moved back into the home. The son was acting disrespectfully to them and the peace that the couple once had was disrupted. In this situation, they allowed a fourth voice in.

Another couple said that their mother-in-law had come for an extended visit and now the couple was fighting. The wife kept stating that it was her mother and that she owed it to her to care for her. It is beautiful to see children caring for their parents and is honorable, but it must be done all while protecting your unity and love. Remember, your first commitment is to your spouse.

When we first married, I called my best friend every day, sharing every detail of my life with her. My husband became jealous and I didn't understand why. He shared with me that he only knew what was on my heart when he listened to me talk to my best friend. He felt that he only knew me through her. My friend was not the blame for coming between us because I was the one who allowed her to become the fourth voice. I knew that my friend cared for me and my marriage, so I took her to lunch and shared how I needed to put as much effort into my relationship with my husband as I had with ours. I wanted to develop the kind of bond that we had with my husband. She felt that it was a compliment to her and supported me. We began to limit how much time we spent on the phone and going on girl dates. Our friendship never suffered. It seemed that she respected me more and would say that I was an example of a good wife.

There are always voices in your marriage. A fourth voice is anything that would try to separate your marriage, and could be T.V., sports, spending habits, kids, in-laws, negativity, and criticism, to name a few. This doesn't mean that there won't be issues that will arise in your relationship; instead, it simply means that you don't allow any circumstances to come between your unity in the form of a fourth voice. When you side with the fourth voice, you become unified with the other voice instead of your mate.

When my husband and I got married, we had both been divorced and both of our ex-spouses were drug addicted. They would interrupt our children's lives by promising that they would pick our children up, but never showed up, or they would say things to turn the kids against us. We could have easily started arguing over this, but we decided to recognize them as the enemy and to work together to resolve the problems.

Years ago, we counseled two couples in a group setting. The wives became friends and instead of listening to the godly wisdom, they started supporting one another. Eventually, the one wife told the other that she should leave her husband, and not long after, the wife did. The following year, the same voice that told the ex-wife to leave her husband married him herself. The only other voice that should be allowed in your relationship is one assisting you both together to be more unified and is one that you both agree upon.

“Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.”

– Genesis 2:24 (KJV)

Honor is to show great respect and admiration. It is highly valuable in marriage, and you should always look for ways to honor your spouse and ways to show that you admire them and that they mean the world to you. This can be achieved in big ways, but the small ways are just as effective. I had a patient develop a breed of a daylily in honor of me. He even went as far as to register the plant with the daylily foundation. When I brought the plant home, I asked my husband to plant it for me. I expressed how much it meant to me and he assured me that he would take care of it.

A week went by, and the plants were still set in the pot. By the second week, I felt dishonored. My husband knew how important that was to me and yet he did not take the time to plant it. I didn't say anything to my husband because I probably would have dishonored him in my response. One thing that we express with all of our clients is the importance of prayer. I continued to pray about it and one day after work, I came home, and the plant was planted, and the yard was cleaned up as well. Sometimes, it is in the small things where people need to feel honored.

We should always look for ways to honor our mate. I love it when we give the assignment for couples to ask each other what they need. Many times, couples are surprised. We've heard things such as, "I need you to listen to me when I have a problem at work," or, "I need you to protect me when the kids come against me."

When my husband comes home from work, I like to have his dinner ready and the dishes washed, because it drives him crazy to have a cluttered kitchen. I don't do these things because he demands I do them, but because I want to honor him in this way. When McDonald's came out with a caramel frappe, I fell in love with them. My husband knows how much I enjoy them, and now and then he brings me one after work. This is a two-dollar item, yet I feel so honored by it. In this way, we should always look for ways to honor our mate.

Always look for ways to stay connected to your mate. If anything tries to steal you from that, then you must recognize it. No one is responsible for this except you. Always look for ways to do better together. Have those conversations about evaluating relationship progress. Keep a journal, log the areas that you both are working on, and celebrate your wins. Reward yourselves with a date or gift to commemorate your work.

Chapter 4: Respecting the Husband

God is a God of order and He established a hierarchy. Everyone in the hierarchy has an important function but one is dependent on the other. Just like any company, everyone has a different role. In marriage, submission has been a great topic since the beginning of time. Men used this topic to force women to obey them and many women refuse to entertain the idea. Much of the reasoning behind this is that many men are not good leaders. Why would a woman want to follow a man when they are a better leader themselves? Submission does not mean that you have no voice and become a doormat, although in some cultures, that is submission. Let's look at 1 Corinthians 11:3 (NIV), which reads, "But I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God."

Submission defined is willingly placing yourself under one's authority while keeping in step with your responsibility in Christ. If my husband said to me, "we are going to rob a bank to make ends meet," I would not be obligated to submit to that.

Ephesians 5:22 (NIV) says, "Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord." The scripture says to submit to him as unto the Lord, which means that if it goes against the will of God, then you are not to submit. There is safety in the Word; it is our blueprint to follow. Have you ever had a good leader in a job? I had a boss named Tim Mills and he always included the whole team when making decisions. He ultimately had the final say-so, but everyone had an opportunity to weigh in; no one was dismissed as invaluable. Our team was selected to open an entire new wing in the hospital because we were the strongest team. As you can see, there is strength in order. When Eve was created, God told Adam that he would create him a mate.

"Wives, in the same way, submit yourselves to your own husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives, when they see the purity and reverence of your lives."

– 1 Peter 3:1-2 (NIV)

"Without words" in this passage is referring to nagging. We met with a couple and the first thing that came out of the husband's mouth was that he was tired of being fussed at every single day. It wasn't working. The only thing the fussing caused was to make him want to escape, and the husband's escape was his phone. As a result, the wife complained that all he ever did was play on his phone, which was an issue.

When we taught this in a class, someone asked, “So then how do they recover from the damage and how do they move in the right direction from here?”

1 Peter 3: 1-2 says, “they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives, when they see the purity and reverence of your lives.”

Wives, we must change our behavior from nagging to trusting God. When you nag, you are hyper-fixed on the negatives and it is hard to see any of the good. Even when your point is valid, the nagging will not motivate your husband to change. When the husband sees the purity and reverence means that the change will come as we stop nagging, live as a woman of God, and respect our husbands. When my husband placed bids for commercial jobs for our company, I felt that he bid on jobs that our company was not equipped for. I would get so frustrated when trying to reason with him. When trying to discuss it with him, I would explode on the inside. We just couldn't get on the same page. Finally, I decided that only God could help him see. When I would think about it, I would say to myself, “Lord, I trust You.” I would thank God that He met all of our needs and that he would continue to speak to my husband. Every time that you celebrate the good that you see, you plant a new seed. Continue to plant new seeds and God will grow it. Look at ways that you have honored each other and build on it.

As we continue to read, 1 Peter 3: 3-4 reads, “Your beauty should not come from outward adornments, such as elaborate hairstyles and the wearing of gold jewelry or fine clothes. Rather, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight.”

This verse does not imply that wives are to wear long, black dresses, wear no makeup, and cover their face with a veil. Instead, it means that you should focus on what's in your heart, the inner beauty, and what is allowed to come out rather than just looking great outwardly. You must create an atmosphere to promote growth. A gentle and quiet spirit, as mentioned in verse 4, means to stay in peace. It is valuable to God. It lets God know that you are trusting in Him to fix this. God is attracted to faith, and He won't let you down.

Verse 5-6 read, “For this is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to adorn themselves. They submitted themselves to their own husbands, like Sarah, who obeyed Abraham and called him her lord. You are her daughters if you do what is right and do not give way to fear.” This simply says that this is how women should respond when you trust God. They submit to their husband like Sarah; Sarah called her husband, her Lord but not as a savior.

She called him her Lord to imply that he was a man and leader that she wanted to follow and submit to him. She was saying that she trusted that he would lead their family according to the plan of God.

A lot falls on our husbands. If your husband isn't walking in his position the way that he should, begin to minister life and encouragement to help him to grow into his position. When you get frustrated and toss up your arms, you will never see change. It may not even feel fair, but someone has to be willing to put the work into your garden if you ever expect to see growth.

We work with a couple that has unruly teens. They often speak to their father rudely. The wife complained that he should stand up and walk in his role as the head. We gave them homework of sticking together as a unified front. Not long after, their daughter erupted with emotion and started yelling at the father. With his wife by his side, he corrected his daughter, telling her that her behavior would no longer be tolerated by him or their mother. He had never exerted authority this way before. His wife was so proud and gave him a high-five. Don't forget to celebrate those small wins.

Next, verse 7 reads, "Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers."

In other words, husbands are also to be mindful of the wife. They are also to respect her as the one who are allowing him to lead. This is a huge responsibility. He must not take this position lightly, as the husband is in a position of director of the company. He is to ensure the success of the company, but he should consult his business partner, who is his wife.

Verse 8 reads, "Finally, all of you, be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble."

Stay in unity with one another, stay in love and don't think that you know all the answers and you are a ruler. Lead with love in a way that others want to follow. "Team" means that everyone works for a common goal. So often, couples fail because they refuse to fight for the common goal instead of the personal one. For example, consider a couple that can't agree on money. They both say that they want to save for a house and that they want a five-year plan to reach that goal. The next week, the husband sees a newer model car. He then begins to argue with the wife as to why he should be able to buy it.

Last night, my husband and I met with a couple working to become more unified. They said that they argued because their adult children had been taking up too much of the wife's time. This couple agreed that they needed to spend more time together in order to become more unified. However, the wife's desire to help her adult children led to her spending time away from her husband, which did not allow the time they needed to become more unified. The husband became angry and started golfing with his coworkers daily. We simply asked them if this was what he wants for his marriage? They had gotten off focus of the common goal of living in unity to personal goals.

Verse 9 reads, "Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult. On the contrary, repay evil with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing."

This is difficult sometimes because when you are mistreated you want to defend yourself. Remember that you and your spouse are working to become unified. Ask yourself, "Will my actions promote unity or not?" If the answer is no, you are moving into the realm of operating as enemies if you continue in that direction. When you respond with a blessing to an offense, you remind your mate that you are supposed to be on the same team simply by your actions. Remember that a soft answer turns away wrath. A wife usually doesn't hurt her husband physically. The weapon that women use most is words. You have the power to build or tear down with them. Life and death are in the power of your tongue, so speak life into it.

"Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it and indulge it will eat its fruit and bear the consequences of their words."

– Proverbs 18:21 (AMP)

Husbands, take the role as head seriously. Think of it this way – the head of a human body determines what the rest of the body will do. If the head is out of sync with the rest of the body then it will not function as it should. Husbands have an opportunity to lead their family in a way that promotes love and unity. Wives should always look for a way to cheer on their husbands. Stay unified and you will most definitely win in life together. There is great strength in unity.

Chapter 5: Husband's Love for the Wife

“Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated their own body, but they feed and care for their body, just as Christ does the church – for we are members of his body. ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.’ This is a profound mystery – but I am talking about Christ and the church. However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.”

– Ephesians 5:21-33 New International Version (NIV)

A husband's role is to love his wife. In fact, it is a commandment; it is not commanded that the wife loves the husband, although that is what we should do. The command for the wife is to respect her husband. Love is measured and sacrificed – not enjoyment. If a husband says that he loves his wife because she takes care of the house or she cooks his dinner, that's the husband loving what his wife does for him, not him loving her. That is the husband loving and benefiting from what his wife does.

When a wife does these things for her husband and her family, that is actually the wife loving them. Genesis chapter 2, verse 19, reads, “but for Adam no suitable helper was found.” This tells me that Eve was created to be a helper for Adam. This doesn't mean that the man is to lord over her, she is to be a *helper*.

Verse 21 reads, “so the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and when he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and then closed up the place with flesh. The Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.” Adam was a complete person but then God said that it wasn't good for man to be alone, so he put him to sleep and from his side he took part of the man and created a woman. When God took part of Adam, he created a being with different kinds of emotions, ideas, and values. They all came from

him, so for a man not to include his wife on decisions would mean that he is not including all that God would have for him.

Further in this chapter, in verse 23, the Word says, “This is now bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh.” If the wife is not happy, the husband should not assume that she will just get over it. Remember, you are only as strong as your weakest link. If your wife is broken and hurt, then you are too. If your wife is always hurting and broken, it is a direct reflection of her husband. God sees you as one. Husbands have more power than they may even be aware of.

The other day, my husband said something to me on the phone. He mentioned that he loved the place we were in our relationship, and then he asked, “do you?” I was so moved by that because most husbands don’t ask that question. It puts you in a vulnerable place, because the answer could not be favorable. However, my husband asked that question, letting me know that he wanted to be sure that we both were in a good place. A good husband, who loves his wife, will evaluate. My spouse is such a good husband that he was looking for a real answer because if there were areas that he felt we needed to adjust, he was willing to make those steps.

As couples, we are always evolving and life happens, jobs change, children grow, finances are different, and many other areas transform. There are many aspects that were once great in our relationship, but as we’ve changed, we no longer see them the same. When my husband asked that question, he was in essence asking if there was anything that we need to change to make our relationship better for both of us.

Ephesians 5:21 reads, “submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.” To submit is to willingly place oneself under one’s authority while keeping in step with your relationship with Christ. Verse 23 goes on to say, “for the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior.”

What is the function of the hand? It has your eyes for direction. If Christ is the head of the church, he knows the direction the church should go in. If the husband is head of the wife, he knows the direction to get you to flourish into the person you ought to be, and he has the ability to do that. For example, when my husband and I met, I had seen many women mistreated by men, including my mother and my aunts. We start to develop ideas about ourselves, such as “we’re not pretty enough,” “we’re not good enough,” “we don’t deserve to be loved,” “we’re too fat,” and all kinds of false accusations about ourselves. We internalized all of this mistreatment.

Sometimes, I did not even know what I had in my heart. This is what life does to you. Then all of a sudden along comes a guy who treats you well, and you get married with the intent that it is going to be great, as it was when you first met. As the honeymoon period wears off, you start noticing all of the things that come out that you didn't know were there. The husband starts saying, "this is not the woman I married," or, "this isn't the woman I was dating."

Here is an important key. The reason the husband didn't see all of those undesirable things from his wife is because he was doing and saying all the right things to transform her, to cause her to respond in the way he enjoyed. He would go out of his way to please his wife, heating her car, making sure her tank was full for the week, and walking her to her car. All those sacrifices were made in the beginning and were what caused the husband and wife to change.

Somewhere along the way, those sacrificial acts start to die off. When that happens, the relationship starts to dwindle. You keep it going by continuing to make those sacrifices. I have to brag on my husband, because even to this day he still opens my door and he still heats my car. When I would work night shifts, when I arrived home my husband would assist me out of my car and rub my feet until I fell asleep. Often, my husband had breakfast ready for me when I arrived home. He still makes those kinds of sacrifices for me. These are the kinds of things that transform me, telling me that I am a queen in my house, I am loved, I am valued, and I am significant in our home. It causes me to change, because his love and sacrifices make me want to be the best version of myself. He realizes that if I am not taken care of, he's not taken care of. My husband realizes that if I am hurting, he is hurting. A husband should never leave his wife in a position where she does not feel like a queen, and if he does, he must begin to find out what he needs to do to help transform her. Just like the body of Christ, we don't know all the things that we need healing and deliverance from. Christ, being the head, sees our potential and knows how to get us to the place that we ought to be. Husbands have the ability to wash us with their love.

In order for husbands to understand how to love their wives, they first must understand how Christ loved the church. How did Christ love the church? He sacrificed, gave of himself, and he didn't say that he was going to save the church, because they are a perfect, well put together group of people. No, Christ knew that we didn't know which direction to go in; he knew that we didn't know our value, and he knew that we did not feel valuable or lovable. He knew that we were lost. Christ gave himself up. He said, "I am going to fight for them, all the way to the death."

Husbands are to fight for their wives so that they can become all that they can become. Christ understood that he had the power to create a beautiful bride. He knew that if he would pour out his love, he would cause her to become what his church should be. Your husband has the power to create in his wife what he wants. When my husband has an area that he would like to see me change in, I am willing to listen, simply because it does not come from a place of criticism, but it comes from a place of love. Because I know that my husband would never do or say anything to hurt me, I am able to receive it. I am very independent and often make choices without my husband. He once stated that I don't need him because I make all decisions alone. I felt terrible for making him feel that way because he had shown me nothing except love. I'm not saying that what I hear is always things that don't hurt; I am saying that my husband proved that he loves me and that what he asks to see is only going to make our relationship better. Often, husbands start by trying to correct all of the flaws without establishing love; love must be established first.

Verse 24 reads, "Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything." This simply means that, as the husband follows Christ, it's easy to follow him. You don't mind following certain people in leadership if they lead you in a productive direction. Christ loved the church by giving his life for it. Why? Because he saw a potential and he knew where he could take the church if he loved it.

John 15:13 reads, "Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends." Husbands, and wives should be friends.

Matthew 20: 28 reads, "just as the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve, and to give his life for ransom for many." Christ did not come to be served; he came to serve.

Serving shows proof of love, and Ephesians 5:26 reads, "to make her holy," meaning that you set her apart for you. Husbands hold the key to create something beautiful in a wife. Love never fails; you just cannot quit. Verse 26 discusses cleansing her by the washing with water through the word. If a husband tells the wife how beautiful she is over and over, she will begin to believe it. If he continues to tell the wife how much he loves and values her, she will begin to believe him, and out of that belief she will begin to respond. Wives must hear life spoken into them in that word, and it will change the way they act.

Verse 27 reads, "and to present her to himself as a radiant church." Have you ever gone somewhere, and everyone was excited to see you? When you walked into the room, you brought energy with you. You will be full of life. People will notice how happy you are, and people will

say things like, “her husband takes good care of her.” When you feel love, it causes you to be joyful. We see couples that are heavy and serious; they never smile. This indicates that the husband and wife do not nurture one another. When you are loved repeatedly, it shows. You look like a radiant church.

Verse 27 mentions “without stain;” stains are on the outside of an object. It’s those things that could affect me but they don’t because I am supported by my husband. During the course of our marriage I never felt racism because my husband would never let me be influenced by it. He would remind me that it has no bearing on our marriage. He would say, “Let’s focus on us instead.” You could have the worst day at work, and it stains you on the outside. When I know I am loved, I know that I can come home to be rejuvenated. My husband can help me remove those stains. The stains might come from the kids, bills, or one’s career, but as long as I am loved, I know that I have the support to get me through it. I could have millions of reasons why I could have left my husband, but it’s the love that keeps me there. Love will cause you to stick with it and not quit.

Verse 27 also mentions “or wrinkles,” referring to a person who is wrinkled and older. This refers to history. Old hurt and old wounds may come from our childhood, when we were little girls, or from being abused, raped, or devalued. These are all old wounds. I read a story about a young lady who was thrown in the trash. She was found by a stranger and now she’s dealing with the hurt of rejection. Some of these things don’t resurface until we get married. I remember when my husband said something that triggered an old emotion from my first marriage. Since my husband loves me so much, I was able to tell him that it hurt me in such a way. Love is careful, and my husband carefully reassured me that he did not mean to hurt me. That love is what caused me to heal from that old pain. Sometimes it can be frustrating, and your husband may just want to retreat and take care of himself. However, remember that God does not see two; he sees one. If a wife is hurting, so is the husband.

Verse 28 reads, “In the same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies.” In other words, when you are thinking of yourself and you are thinking about how you will take care of yourself, such as planning to go to the gym, get a haircut, or to buy new clothes, remember you are doing all of those things to make sure you look good. You cannot forget your wife, because she wants to look good as well, not just outwardly but also inwardly. If that means you need counseling, so be it, or perhaps means you need to spend more time together. Whatever it is, it should be your priority to take care of yourself, which also means taking care of your marriage.

People will often ask how we ever survived raising six kids. We never let their lives overtake ours. We would go on a last-minute date or take a car ride in the evening just to talk and reconnect. We could feel when we started to grow apart, and we did not like it.

The greatest weapon that we use to take care of ourselves and each other is to spend time in prayer and in the Word. We pray over each other every day. The question should always be, “are we happy where we are in our relationship?” If not, evaluate what it is that you need to do to invest in your relationship, as it is a weapon and it conquers all. You can’t continue to love someone without them changing; that is impossible. Many husbands say to us that they are tired of giving and not getting anything back, but you must be consistent, because if you are, you will reap the benefits.

For example, when you started your job, you were consistent, and that’s why you received the raise and the promotion. You reaped what you sowed, and the same will happen in your relationship. As verse 28-29 say, “He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated their own body, but they feed and care for their body, just as Christ does the church.

Verse 30 states, “for we are members of his body.” Remember, you are on the same team, and you are only as good as the weakest link. Verse 31 goes on to say, “For this reason, a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.” In other words, you can’t hold on to the past; you have to move on so you can start building your relationship in love for one another, continually growing as one.

Verse 32-33 reads, “This is a profound mystery but I am talking about Christ and the church. However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.” Naturally, this doesn’t make sense to love someone who is often unlovable, yet the Word says that this is a profound mystery.” Jesus didn’t give himself for you because you deserved it; he did it because he knew your potential.

Husbands, it is your job to see the potential in your wife and to help her to get there. You have the ability to create in her a beautiful bride that you can be proud of and enjoy for the rest of your life. No matter what it seems, God’s word works. I am speaking from experience, because when we got married, I did not have the ability to even show my emotional love, even when I felt it. I was so afraid of rejection, disappointment, failure, and hurt. My husband could look at me with love in his eyes, and I would turn my head out of fear. However, he never quit showing me his love. I remember sitting on the bed one day and saying to him that I wished I could give him

what he wanted. From that day forward, we agreed that we would pray together and ask for God to help me too love him in such a way. Now, I can think about my husband even during the day and I am able to call him to tell him how much I love and appreciate him. He fills my love and there are no hindrances now. It is a beautiful place to be in our relationship and I have no regrets about becoming vulnerable that way. Most couples never experience what I'm talking about.

If you are reading this, I hope you are willing to take that deeper step in your relationship, because it is so worth it. It doesn't happen overnight; it takes time and you must be faithful. You must walk by faith and not by sight. The things that changed in me were not because my husband tried to control or manipulate me. Instead, it was God doing the work in me as he was obedient to do what His word said to do, which was to love me. He would say that when I shined, it was a direct reflection of him.

“Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.”

– 1 Corinthians 13:4-7(NIV)

Chapter 6: I Need to Feel Your Love

In one of our classes, we heard a common statement and that is that everyone enjoys their relationship most when they're just talking! People love those times when you are just lying in bed having casual pillow talk. Having dialogue about your future and your present is *so* fulfilling. In order for any relationship to be successful, there must be some talking, so if you are not a talker, you have to become one. Couples that don't talk fill in the blanks for themselves. The problem with this is that you cannot reach your spouse's mind, so you fill in the blanks with misinformation. This is kind of like attending college with no instructor and trying to take the test without any given information – you are going to fail. Setting time to be alone is a great way to have meaningful dialogue. We worked with a couple that said they never seemed to discuss the important issues in their relationship. They chose Sunday as the day that they would come together to connect. They called it "Sunday Funday." They were to determine together what their subject of discussion should be. They started their day with breakfast then would drive to a park to walk and talk. They were so thankful for the assignment. They said that having the set time and right atmosphere helped the conversation.

An emotional connection is a bond or tie to someone who you share emotions with, such as anger, sorrow, joy, or love. Vulnerability means that you are capable of being emotionally wounded and are open to attack or damage. In order to have an emotional connection with your spouse, you first must be willing to be vulnerable. That's a scary place for a lot of people.

When working with one couple, we learned that the husband had not been so truthful. The first thing that the wife said in our session was that she did not trust him any longer. He hurt her by being dishonest. Now, she was afraid to open up to vulnerability again. She was wounded while being vulnerable. The worst thing that you can do when developing an emotional connection is to not be trustworthy. The minute you are not trustworthy, the emotional connection begins to crumble. In order for this relationship to be restored the husband had to put in the work of gaining trust. He was willing and began to be truthful with his wife. Whenever she felt that he wasn't he gave her permission to ask. He would reassure her that he was focused on rebuilding. We as their coaches provided the accountability. Before the end of their sessions they were in a happy place.

Couples that come to us for premarital counseling have dreams of having a wonderful, connected marriage. We spend a lot of time learning about their past failures and hurts. If past hurts have not been dealt with it, this will hinder the couple from having that emotional bond. You

must realize how important it is to protect each other. What happens between a husband and wife should never ever be discussed outside of their relationship unless you both agree. The scripture says to cleave to each other because now you are one unit. If anything in your relationship does not enhance your relationship, you must address it. No matter what it is, you have to protect that, because that's the way you start to build the unity that you desire.

Everyone wants to have love like in a movie scene, but you cannot have the movie scene if you're not first protective of each other. Loneliness from the heart is a state of solitude, a feeling of emptiness. If a husband or wife comes to us and says that they are lonely, there is a disconnect. Something has not been addressed in their relationship. You cannot ignore it; instead, you have to fight for your emotional connection. If you don't have a good emotional connection, you don't have a fulfilling relationship. When you spend time with your friends, you laugh and have fun. You also go through hard times together. You feel each other's pains and sorrows, and you rejoice in their victories. At the end of the day, you are still friends. In fact, you feel closer because you discovered that you shared all of life's ups and downs, which strengthens your relationship. When you can trust a friend to love you and support you, you will continue to migrate towards them.

For many couples, spouses and friends do not go hand-in-hand. Your spouse should be your best friend. Continue to work towards that. When I first got married, I felt that I was well put together. I was strong and independent, and my husband said that he didn't want a wife who was hard. I honestly did not realize that that's where I was. Instead, my husband wanted someone who needed him and was not afraid to show it. I was confused because I did not know how to give him what he needed. Literally, I struggled with this for years. We would discuss my disconnect with my emotions. This was the first step to my healing.

I had been wounded in so many ways, so that the place of vulnerability was far out of reach. It was easy for my husband to be transparent in his love and desire toward me. Even in the way that he shared his deepest desires, I began to feel that I could trust him. I felt that if he was able to share such deep, intimate thoughts, he trusted me. It didn't make sense for me not to trust him. Since my husband kept giving me what he wanted, I began to want to give him what he wanted. Over the years, I learned that in order for a marriage to be the best it can be, it takes both partners to be willing to meet each other's needs. Emotional bonds are created by trust, security, and empathy.

There are several ways to connect emotionally. Empathy is the ability to relate to your mate by simply placing yourself in their shoes. I would empathize with my husband by looking at myself. I remember sitting on my patio one day, wondering whether or not I would want to be married to myself. I thought about all of the great qualities I possessed, but that I could do better in expressing my love. That day, I felt the pain that my husband must have felt for years. You see, I never wondered if my husband loved me, because he had no problem showing me. At times, I behaved in ways that probably made my husband feel like I could take him or leave him. I never wanted him to feel this way, because he did not deserve it; no one deserves to feel that way.

Many areas in which couples experience disconnect could be resolved if the couple would simply empathize with each other. When we would go to church, people come to give us hugs, and I would hug men and women the same way. My husband pulled me aside and said that it made him uncomfortable when I would hug men the same way that I hug women, and I told him that I was thinking of no one except for him. My husband explained that he trusted me, but that it could cause other men to think of me in ways that they ought not.

For several months, I didn't want to discuss it with my husband because I knew where my heart was. One day, my husband brought it up again in our conversation, and once again, I became frustrated. When I was alone, I began to empathize with him about it in my mind. I wondered how I would feel if he hugged women the way he hugged me, and my heart sank. I couldn't wait for my husband to come home that evening so I could apologize. Immediately, we became more emotionally connected simply because I chose to listen and try to understand his point of view. When I resisted being empathetic, it caused a separation. My husband was emotionally pulling away from me in that situation. In a marriage, no one should ever be so stubborn and narcissistic that they are not able to empathize. I'm not saying that you will always be wrong or right, but I am saying it's worth evaluating. People who aren't empathetic often allow problems to linger, potentially for years with no resolve. Remember your goal in all your relationships should lead to a place of unity.

Study each other. Know what it is that your mate likes and dislikes. My husband loves it when I call to check on him during my day. Every morning before we leave for work, he kneels beside our bed and prays for me and the rest of our family. If I am running late, as soon as I get in the car, he calls me, and we pray over the phone. Because my husband takes the time to do these things, it lets me know that he loves me, which causes me to want to bond with him even more.

He knows that I love a massage. Personally, I hate giving massages, so when he gives me one every single day, it feels like a huge sacrifice. My husband says he likes to do it because it makes me feel better. Being aware of what each other needs and trying your best to be that support for one another is a great tool in becoming emotionally connected.

When I was married to my first husband, I began to wonder if our marriage was failing when he stopped showing affection towards me. He started sleeping in the living room and the kisses goodbye turned into loose hugs. There is so much power in touch. Now, my husband knows how much I love to be massaged. He enjoys expressing his affection towards me that way. Early on in our marriage, I used to think that it was corny that he loved to hold my hand and sit close to me on our sofa. I thought it would wear off after the honeymoon phase was over, but it never has. My husband has been so consistent with his affection that it reaffirms his love for me every day. He was not doing it because we were newlyweds, he was simply doing it because he loves me. Now, I have learned to appreciate it; in fact, I depend on it. If he would stop showing affection, our emotional connection would suffer. There are many ways to show physical affection, such as holding hands. We hold hands because we enjoy the physical touch. There are times when we are asleep and I wake up to discover that we are holding hands. It has become one of our healthy habits that keeps us emotionally connected.

When we first got married, I found it difficult to be affectionate because I was afraid of rejection. I was afraid that if I showed affection the way that we do now, it would not be returned. I felt that it was safer to not show affection and I convinced myself that it would be okay if I didn't. If this is your situation, then continue to show affection to your mate anyway. Persistence in pursuing them will prove that your heart is with them. Others suffer from low self-esteem and they simply feel that they do not deserve love and affection. You have the ability to help change their future by loving your spouse through it all. Never stop sharing with your mate how much they mean to you in word and deed. They need it!

One of the greatest obstacles to emotional connection is mistrust. I think of marriage as a bridge between two people. In order for the bridge to flow freely, it must be free of obstacles, and mistrust is one of these obstacles. It's as if a piece of that bridge has been blown away. When my first husband and I worked on reconciliation after an affair, there were so many circumstances that arose in my mind. Although he said all of the right things to keep me there, his actions said something different. If he was at the store for five extra minutes, I wondered where he was and

what he was doing. I didn't want to be affectionate with him, because I wondered if he was truly thinking of me or someone else. Sexual relations were hindered because I wondered if I was what he wanted. "Why did he cheat in the first place?" I wondered. Mistrust in marriage can be the death of it.

Now, my husband and I work extremely hard to create an environment in our relationship where mistrust is not a concern. We understand that our relationship means more to us than misleading each other. We worked with a couple that was trying to work through infidelity. We warned them that this would not be easy but that it is possible as long as they committed to making the necessary changes. The husband often lied about speaking with other women and the wife was frequently checking his phone messages. The husband worked hard and tried to restore his marriage and seemed to be making good choices; however, the wife struggled in believing him. I reminded them that a piece of the bridge has been blown out and that it will take time to rebuild it. The husband had to be persistent in proving his love for his wife, taking the necessary steps to make his spouse trust that she could begin to show affections towards him again. He would need to court her all over again. I always say, "Proof of desire is in the pursuit." He must be willing to put in the work to rebuild the bridge. The wife said that she always feared his lack of faithfulness to her when he took too long at the grocery store or when he said he was stuck in traffic. The husband would reassure her by calling her via FaceTime. She then could see that he was truthful.

The whole process can be exhausting for both wife and husband, but trust can be restored. It is better to never disrupt your trust in such a great way. Everyone in a relationship will fail to some degree but lying and cheating will destroy your bridge if it's never corrected. Having a person to be accountable to during this difficult time may be necessary.

The last area that I want to mention is fighting fair. When couples have disagreements, they often begin to say things that are hurtful. When couples fight to win, no one wins. The goal of a disagreement should be to find resolution or a place of unity. Mary and Austin came to see us because they constantly argued about spending. They had been married for eight years, yet they had never gotten to a place of unity in this area. Mary wanted to be able to spend what she wanted whenever she wanted, and Austin felt that they should hold one another accountable in finances. We asked them, "What do you want to see happen in your financial future?" We discovered that the couple had never discussed this in all those years. We were able to help them refocus on

winning together. When you have a disagreement, focus on the problem and not at winning an argument.

There is nothing sweeter than having a spouse who you can trust with your emotions – someone who loves you freely. It will cause your self-esteem to soar and you will be able to say that you are truly blessed. Never stop being trustworthy, never stop expressing love, and never stop being intimate. Do not take love for granted.

Chapter 7: Guard Your Heart

In this chapter, I want to discuss something that is normally not found in marriage and relationship books, but it is extremely important – matters of the heart. Everything that destroys a marriage first starts within it, and everything good that happens in any marriage also starts there. The scripture tells us that in the heart of the man is where your life begins and then everything you do flows from it.

I have been a cardiac rehab nurse for twenty-eight years. My current role is to educate patients on having a healthy heart. When patients come to me, they are afraid, anxious, and focused on doing whatever it takes to have a healthy heart again. When they have a cardiac event, they realize just how important their heart is. All of a sudden, work, friends, golfing, smoking, and drinking become easy to set aside. They realize just how close they were to losing everything from the attack of the heart.

Proverbs 4:23 (NIV) states, “Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it.” Here, the scripture tells us that the greatest thing you could do is to guard your heart, so let me explain. Our son, Rollan, was part of the military police in the Air Force. He would guard the base from the outside. The word “guard” here reveals to me that there must be an enemy who wants to infiltrate our hearts. If there wasn’t, then there would be no need for a guard. When my patients have a heart attack, they send them to me for a reset. There are three components that I focus on, diet: (what we feed on), consistent exercise (how we function), and stress (what we think about). The function of the heart is to supply good, oxygen-rich blood to the rest of the body. If it fails, you die. In the same way, the enemy wants your heart because he knows that if he can get a foothold in your heart, he can change the whole course of your life. Proverbs 4:23 (AMP) reads, “Watch over your heart with all diligence, for from it flows the springs of life.” It is extremely important to watch what you allow into your heart, keeping in mind that the enemy gets in through three ways.

Through Our Minds

When I was married to my first husband, I was devastated when I found out that he was having an affair. During my last semester in college, I joined a study group. Most of the women had been either divorced or were going through one and we had men-bashing conversations. We

talked about how all men were dogs and we would say that they were all just different breeds. Some were poodles, some were German shepherds, and some were pit bulls, but all of them were classified as “dogs.” It felt good to vent during the moment, but when I left the study group, I knew I grieved the Holy Spirit. I had let my guard down.

I knew that God had a call on my life to help marriages, so I wanted to change my view. The enemy knew that if I had not changed my view, I would have never opened my heart to receive love from another man. As Christians, if the enemy cannot completely derail the call that God has on your life, he will try his best to poison our hearts so that we are unfit for God’s kingdom’s purposes. His goal is to create a bad marriage for us or to destroy it. We try to keep anything out of our relationship that causes us to pull away from each other. It could be a television show, a rude comment, an old boyfriend, or many other things. We worked with a wife that felt as if she didn’t look good enough for her husband because he always compared her body to those that he saw on television. Watching the words that we speak to one another is important. Watching what we allow into our own hearts is even more important. What we are allowing in will eventually come out.

“The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.”

– John 10:10 (NIV)

Diet

One area that I focus on with my patients after a cardiac event is their diet. We want to identify what they are taking into their bodies that is an enemy of their hearts. First, we send them to sit down with our dietitian. Now, I know I’m discussing all of these things in the natural sense, but they are also a good indicator of how things work in the spiritual. What we are allowing into our bodies is either bringing life or death. We tell patients that they shouldn’t eat things such as burgers, fries, donuts, and potato chips. All of these things increase the risk of damage to the heart.

Now, let’s look at this in the spiritual. Things that could be poisoning our hearts are the people we let into our lives, and the people who we let speak into our ears, as well as certain places that we go and certain things that we allow ourselves to speak of. To protect your spiritual heart, it will cost you something. You will need to make changes. We encourage my patients to start

eating fish and decreasing fat consumption, while we have them decrease things that make their flesh happy.

In your marriage, you need to guard your heart if you to be strong as well. We meet so many couples who are not guarding their hearts. In fact, we met with a couple that had two beautiful children and had been married for seven years. The husband became friends with a man who had an addiction to pornography. He introduced this husband to it and even showed him ways that he could keep it hidden from his wife. Two years later, this man became unhappy in his relationship with his wife. He was infatuated with what he saw on the screen of his phone. He ended up having an affair and it destroyed their marriage. Again, the scripture of Proverbs 4: 23 in the Amplified Bible says to “watch over your heart with all diligence, for from it flows the springs of life.” When we visited the hills of Tennessee, there are springs that the people depend on for life. If your heart flows springs of life, why would you want to pollute it? This is why the scripture tells us to guard it with all diligence. Would it make sense for anyone to dump manure into their spring? When a person does not guard their heart, the equivalent happens. Psalm 119:11, New International Version, says, “I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.” I can’t express the importance of staying connected to God as a couple. Studies show that the divorce rate among couples who pray together daily is 1 out of 1,153. Praying together and reading God’s Word keeps you focused on God and His ways. It unifies us and causes us to act on his wisdom.

Exercise

Another area I discuss with my patients is exercise, asking about their routine. The purpose of exercise is to makes the heart pump stronger and it helps to flush out your circulatory system. Spiritually, it is extremely important that we consistently exercise things that bring life to our marriage. If the enemy can get you to muddy your waters in one area, he knows that it is just a matter of time before it will flow into other areas of your life.

We spoke to a young man who felt that he was called to preach the gospel. He loved street ministry, and when he spoke of it, he got tears in his eyes. He had never begun the street ministry because, in his mind, he felt that he was a failure. The negative thoughts that he listened to caused him to be paralyzed. Additionally, we met with a man and he made great progress in mending his

relationship; however, towards the end of our session, he reverted back to discussing his failures. You see, a lot of marriages suffer because they are stuck in the past.

We reminded that gentlemen to think about what his marriage could be instead of what it has not been. This isn't something that he can do now and again; this is something that he needs to exercise daily. His wife was desperately ready to move on to a better place in their relationship. The husband said he was too, but in his mind, he did not see how it could be possible. New habits must be formed and what he says must line up with the Word of God.

I know that most people don't enjoy exercising, but they do enjoy the results. They feel stronger, they have more energy, and there's more life in their bodies. In the same way, putting new thoughts in your mind takes work; it takes being in the Word, it takes praying, and it takes consistency. When I do these things, I am stronger, and I am better in my relationship because of it. I see things the way God sees them, and I hear what He wants me to hear. I am able to love my husband the way that I need to love him, in the way that He needs to be loved.

I told this couple that they needed to work on changing what was in their hearts. Defeat, hurts, and failure were the muddy waters of their spring. In order to change what was in their hearts, they needed to change what they put into it. Our assignment to them was to spend time every day praying for their marriage and to begin to speak what the word of God says about their future. We had them select scriptures that spoke to their situation and they began to quote them over their marriage. It became their daily affirmations. God's word says that he has plans to prosper his children.

*“My son, pay attention to what I say; turn your ear to my words.
Do not let them out of your sight, keep them within your heart;
for they are life to those who find them and health to one's whole body.
Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it.”*

– Proverbs 4:20-23 (NIV)

Words are powerful and they are the first tool that the enemy uses to try to destroy your marriage. If he can get you to say words against your marriage, you speak life to those words.

“As charcoal to embers and as wood to fire, so is a quarrelsome person for kindling strife.”

– Proverbs 26:21 (NIV)

“A quarrelsome wife is like the dripping of a leaky roof in a rainstorm; restraining her is like restraining the wind or grasping oil with the hand.”

– Proverbs 27:15-16 (NIV)

These two scriptures speak of what words will do in your relationship. In everything you do, your words must lead to unity. Always evaluate your relationship to see if your actions are leading toward more unity or away from it. Years ago, we were friends with another couple with three children. They seemed to be getting along well for many years. However, we started to notice that the husband became critical of his wife. He called her names, such as stupid. Before long, she began to be critical of him in retaliation; they were muddying their spring. Your words are powerful, as I stated earlier.

Here are some ways to guard your heart from a critical spirit.

First, if you say something that does not bring life to your marriage, be quick to repent to your spouse and to God. The more quickly you repent, the less damage will be done.

Next, guard your mind because the scripture says to think about good things. Think of all of the good things that you see in your spouse and do not dwell on the negatives.

“Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things.”

– Philippians 4:8, (NIV)

Additionally, pray, always asking God to help you. Prayer should be done alone and together.

Finally, guard your tongue, and don't let negative words come out of your mouth.

“Anyone who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with their own hands, that they may have something to share with those in need. Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.”

– Ephesians 4:28-30 (NIV)

Guard Your Heart from Emotional Adultery

Emotional adultery is when you allow another person to take the emotional place of your spouse. As I mentioned, when I first got married to my husband, I had a best friend who I called every day. She knew how I felt about everything; she knew my desires and aspirations in life. If I

was not happy about something, she knew it. When I was excited about something, I celebrated with her. My husband became jealous and I did not understand. After all, she was my best friend. My husband kept discussing it with me and we even prayed about it. I simply was not understanding his rationale, but because it came up often in our discussions, I wanted to find that place of unity. I started looking at it from his point of view and at that moment I understood what he felt. I began to make our relationship a priority instead of the one I had with my best friend. I stopped spending so much time on the phone with her especially when he was home. Because of my actions my best friend realized that she had been doing the same thing to her husband as well.

When couples fall into emotional adultery, it is a slippery slope; you allow another person into your heart. However, there are ways to guard your heart from emotional adultery.

First, stop flirting with other people. Flirting is the door that leads to sexual adultery and flirting arouses the senses that should only happen between a husband and wife.

Next, have someone hold you accountable. Confessing to a friend will help you recognize the tactics of the enemy. Remember, the enemy's end goal is to see your marriage destroyed.

Another way to guard against emotional adultery is to seek a counselor. Many people are afraid to go to counseling due to pride, but the scripture says to seek wise counsel.

Guarding Your Heart from Sexual Adultery

Sexual adultery starts with emotional adultery. You've heard the old saying, "Don't play with fire," and that's exactly what emotional adultery is, leading to sexual adultery if it's left unchecked.

To guard your heart, guard yourself from pornography. Pornography leads to dissatisfaction in your sexual relations, and you will begin to desire what looks more exciting. If the enemy can get you to be dissatisfied with what you have, he has created a situation that causes you to look elsewhere.

Additionally, do not place yourself in any position where sexual adultery can occur. When my best friend and I would visit each other, if I arrived at her home and she was not there, I would wait outside or sit in my car. I did not feel that it would be appropriate to be alone with her husband in her home. Working in a hospital, I have seen people of the opposite sex go to lunch together every day, texting each other as friends. Before long, they were being accused of having an affair, and it was quite noticeable that they were emotionally connected on some level.

Finally, keep your business relationships professional. I was in a meeting with a group of doctors and one of them asked if I had a good marriage. I quickly replied that I did not discuss my personal relationships at work. One of the other managers in the room started sharing how she and her husband were fighting, and she confided in two male physicians. I remember sitting there, thinking how dangerous that was and how there was no wisdom being used in that situation.

How to Overcome Sexual Adultery

Seek a counselor. There are so many deep wounds in the case of sexual adultery that most couples never fully recover without help.

Also, be proactive in reconnecting with your spouse. Be quick to repent and to do it as often as your spouse needs. To overcome sexual adultery, also be willing to discuss your emotional needs and desires.

To overcome, also confess to a friend of your infidelity, and pray and read God's word. Confessing your fault to a trusted friend will also help you to remain accountable. When you are tempted to make another mistake a trusted friend would be able to help you see clearly the consequences of your actions.

"Thy word have I hid in my heart, that I might not sin against thee."

– Psalm 119:11, KJV

"Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, Oh Lord, my strength and my Redeemer."

– Psalm 19:14, KJV

Chapter 8: Sex

There is a purpose for putting this topic towards the end of our book, as we want couples to work on all the other areas before expecting to have a beautiful sexual relationship with their spouse. Some couples that come to us complain that they are neglected sexually but the real problem is that they are neglecting all other areas. Sex does not start in the bedroom; it starts throughout the day in the way you honor your spouse. It starts with showing affection throughout the day, and it starts with the way you care for one another. I find it easy to want to satisfy my husband sexually because he has done all of the “prework,” if you will. You must be intentional in your relationship. Sex, outside of physical limitations, will come easy if you are loving your spouse the way that you should.

When couples first get married, they never worry about sex. Most of the time, newlyweds are having it all the time and they both want it all the time. When that fades, they wonder what happened. Sex is a God-given gift that brings the husband and wife together for pleasure. We have never taught that sex is just for procreation. In Genesis 2:24, it is written that “the two shall become one flesh.” Therefore, sex has two purposes – for procreation and for pleasure. This delight should not end after you have children. Your sexual relations should continue to join your minds, bodies, and spirits – together.

Hebrews 13: 4 says “the marriage bed is undefiled.” My husband and I talk about this often because your marriage bed is not to be used to do things that are not pleasing unto the Lord. Solomon, in Proverbs 5:18,19 says to “rejoice in the wife of your youth” and may her breast satisfy you always.” This simply means that you should find pleasure in her and her alone; enjoy her and her body. Treat it with love, tenderness, and respect.

In 1 Corinthians 7:3, the Bible tells us that “The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband.” I found that when I focus on meeting my husband’s needs sexually and he focuses on meeting mine, we both are satisfied. Sex is supposed to be an area that you are free in. A healthy sex life should not be something only for newlyweds. Working to fix your difficulties is worth the effort.

Sex is intended to be a powerful bonding experience between a husband and wife. Often, people are warped in their thinking about sex. Usually that stems from old baggage, such as abuse, low self-esteem, pornography, and bad teachings about the subject. Sex is supposed to unite you and your spouse. Personally, when we don’t feel emotionally connected, sex is something that we

find reconnects us. We have never viewed it as a duty or a chore, although many couples do see it this way. Yes, there are times when I don't feel like it, but that provides my husband with an opportunity to get me in the mood. You won't always have the same sexual drive as your mate, because your drive fluctuates. Be willing to have the conversations about what you need. I have been candid with my husband. In fact, I once told him that if he needed it, he needed to help me need it too.

Over the years, our bodies changed. My hormones are different; I've gained weight. I'm not as agile as I once was. All these things play a role in the sexual experience. Sometimes, we hinder ourselves because of the way we view our bodies. Deanna and Phil were married for twelve years when we met them. They came to us because they were having difficulties in their bedroom. The husband felt that he needed to have sex more often than the wife. When I got Deanna alone, she shared with me how she did not like her body. She gained quite a bit of weight after having three children. Nonetheless, her husband loved her body just the way it was. We started working with her and discovered she was never satisfied with her body, but she accepted the fact that her husband was and that he wanted to enjoy it. Everything about their sexual experience changed from that moment on.

Sexual relations are a process of discovery. Don't fall into the boring trap of doing what you once did to satisfy your partner if it no longer satisfies them. Always look for new ways to keep your fire burning. Try new positions, locations, and lingerie. Share what makes you feel good and what doesn't. Don't make your partner feel like a failure if what he or she tried didn't fulfill you as it once did. I believe that God created our bodies to constantly change and sex should be a continuous act of discovery.

“Bless your fresh-flowing fountain! Enjoy the wife you married as a young man! Lovely as an angel, beautiful as a rose – don't ever quit taking delight in her body. Never take her love for granted!”

– Proverbs 5: 18-19 (MSG)

Sex is a gift to create intimacy and unity. It is intended to be special, fun, and private, so never discuss your sexual encounters with anyone else. This is a guaranteed way to destroy any chances of deeper intimacy. Let your mate know that you desire them by your actions before you get to the bedroom by the way you look at your partner, and through your touch and your words.

During one of our sex classes, Henry came with notebook in hand. He was so excited that he began to slap his leg, saying how he couldn't wait for the class. Henry and his wife had only been married for three years, so I wondered what kind of issues they could possibly be having. His wife, Loretta, could have crawled under a rock. She grew up in a home that taught her that sex was unladylike. In all the three years that they were married, Henry and Loretta never discussed their sexual desires. Their assignment was to start with writing their sexual fantasies of each other. The following week, they were to discuss their list. They admitted that it was awkward at first, but they said that they had the best sexual experience that evening. Many couples are frustrated because they have not ever expressed what turns them on. If you are uncomfortable with the topic, discussing your list is a great way to start.

Sometimes, when there has been sexual abuse, it is hard for men or women to be free, but it can happen. An unhealthy sexual relationship or lack of it leaves one feeling unloved and wondering if there is adultery happening. Since your relations in marriage are extremely important to keep you emotionally connected, if there are difficulties in this area, you and your spouse should agree to work through the difficulties, even if it means that you need a counselor or life coach. Sex is not just about getting naked together; it's more about creating that connection and enjoyment that can be shared together.

After having six children, my husband and I still enjoy each other sexually. We exercised being candid with each other and being able to express our needs, and this should also be your goal. To start, you must make time for each other. We worked with a couple that was extremely busy, running two separate businesses. They had not been sexually intimate for months, so we gave them the assignment of planning which day of the week they would set aside for their intimacy. They realized that it was important, but their businesses were more demanding. They came to us because they realized how much they had grown apart and had gotten accustomed to not connecting sexually.

I discovered that the more you do it, the more you see the benefits of it, and the more you need it. There were times when my husband would say that he felt stressed over his company and sex was how we controlled his stress. Having sex releases hormones in the brain, such as dopamine, which makes you feel good. Oxytocin is also released and causes you to feel connected. Endorphins, which are pain-reducing, are released as well. Once you are free in your sexual

relations, you will begin to see the benefits and you will actually depend on each other to meet these needs, finding great pleasure in doing so.

There are times when it is not realistic to have sexual relations on a regular basis, especially times when one of you is sick. You must be understanding in those situations, but if there is no good reason to withhold, you shouldn't. I spoke to a couple that was not able to have sex the way most do. The husband had an erectile dysfunction and he came up with other ways to satisfy his wife. She said that she was happy in their sexual relationship, and the husband said that he enjoyed satisfying her and that he had to be creative.

Today's society is demanding of our time. People juggle their work and their family schedules. At the end of the day, getting to bed is your main objective. I do a lot of work in the evening after my family is asleep because I can complete my tasks uninterrupted. When I have come to bed late for several days, I know that I need to spend some time with my husband. There have been times that I recognize the need to be connected with him, but that my mind was far from making love. I would tell him that I needed him to give me a massage first, which is a great way for couples to reduce stress and to get their minds off of other things before moving into a sexual encounter. Massages are also stimulating and make for great foreplay. Women in particular usually take a little longer to get aroused, so slow down so that the both of you can experience the fireworks together.

Additionally, sex should never be used to punish your mate. You have no right to withhold sex because you are angry or to use it as leverage to get something else you want. Sex is the way that you confirm your covenant between you and your spouse. I find it interesting that couples that have not been consistent in their sexual relations speak of how they don't feel connected. Sex in marriage keeps your connection and your emotional bond current. If you're struggling in your sexual relations and need healing, please seek help.

Remember, God created sex for pleasure as well as procreation. Couples should always look for ways to satisfy each other. Don't be afraid to have the conversation about what turns them on. This will only increase your intimacy and your emotional connection in all areas.

Chapter 9: Why Budget

Money is the number one reason why people file for divorce. Every couple would agree that money is an important topic but talking about it is often difficult. When my husband and I meet with couples, we ask them what their dreams for their future are. Most would say something like, “we want a nice home and cars, to be able to take yearly vacations and have a savings account for their future and our kid’s future.” Our next question would be, “What’s your business plan to get there?” It is a plan for success. Having a budget in place may seem restrictive but you are more likely to achieve your goals by having one. Setting up a budget should be done as early into the marriage as possible. The good thing is that it is never too late to start one.

We met with one young couple to discuss their finances, and the wife complained that her husband liked to spend money as soon as he got paid. She liked to save and was strict with her budget. The husband shared how he worked hard and should be able to treat himself to whatever he wanted to buy after a hard workweek. In response, the wife stated that she wanted to eventually move out of an apartment. To their surprise, I told them that a budget would allow for both of them to get their wishes. Here are a few of the principles that we shared with them.

Write It Down

As a couple, discuss what your goals are. Where do you want to be in five, ten, fifteen, or twenty years? Discuss plans for mortgages, vacations, college, savings, retirement, and rainy days. Writing your goals down will serve as a reminder for the both of you when you are tempted to get off course. If you are both committed to your goals, the likelihood of you achieving them is realistic.

Don’t Hide Bank Accounts

Hiding bank accounts sends a clear message that you are not willing to be in unity in this area. Once discovered, secret accounts could carry some heavy consequences. Your spouse may wonder what else is hidden. In any healthy relationship, trust is a must. It doesn’t matter who makes the most money or if one partner doesn’t make money at all; financial decisions should be made together. Just because one partner makes most, or all of the money, doesn’t mean that the

opinion of your mate should not be valued. For example, if the new car payment will be paid by the husband, it doesn't mean that the wife can't express what kind of car she would like.

Who Should Handle the Money?

Years ago, my husband and I discovered that he didn't like to give attention to money matters. We had a few late payments and I became frustrated. I am never late on bills because it stresses me out. He and I agreed that I would handle the budget in order to keep our peace but that I would always make the budget plan available for him to see. I felt more at ease having a plan in place for avoiding financial stress, and I am still the budget keeper in our relationship. We review our budget together and I listen to his opinion. Although your system may be different than ours, the important point is to be sure to have a plan.

Budget and Evaluate

As stated earlier, family finances should be treated like a business. The budget should be evaluated at least monthly, and this meeting should only take up to fifteen to twenty minutes.

We are working with a couple who had never budgeted together. They have been married for twelve years. They decided that they wanted to try our budget plan. They presented all of their expenses and their monthly income. I asked them what their financial goals were for their future. They said that they wanted to purchase a home and have a savings account.

We then set up their account where their income will go. They also had each a separate account for what we call, "fun money." They both agreed that their fun money would be \$125 per week each. That money can be spent in any way that they chose. All their other expenses would be paid from the joint account. Anything left over after their expenses would be savings that no one is to touch unless they both agreed. In only two months they have been able to save over \$700.00. They have been amazed at how easy it has been when they worked together in unity. In their monthly budget meetings, they determine whether the budget needs to be adjusted in any way or if spending should be scaled back. The budget is a small step to ensure that you can attain the larger, long-term goal.

Combine – Don't Hide

In marriage, each person should strive for oneness. The decision to spend money is one of the most important decisions that has to be made, so why not make the decision together? Some couples have joint accounts for all income, while others have one joint account for reoccurring expenses and then individual accounts for personal spending. I feel that either way works, as long as it's agreed upon. Together, decide what amount is reasonable for personal spending to be added to individual accounts. Once it's gone, it's gone.

This practice will take patience and dedication. You may even experience some frustrations, but if you both commit to a budget, you will find that it deepens your love and respect.

When we met with Michelle and Andrew, they argued about spending. They'd never made a budget and had been married for eleven years. Michelle loved her morning coffee and was spending eight dollars each day for it. Andrew was frustrated, to the point that he never tried to tackle the issue again. They had never had a savings account and had never been able to plan a family vacation because they didn't know where their money was going. When we took a close look at their debt to income ratio, we discovered that they were unknowingly spending about \$600 unnecessarily a month. There had been no accountability, so Michelle and Andrew were unaware that this was happening.

We helped them to set up a plan that allowed for all of their desires to be met. Michelle and Andrew both agreed that one hundred dollars a week was sufficient "fun" money spending for each of them. They could spend that one hundred dollars any way they chose. All the other money would go into their family account.

The family account is where all normal living expenses would come from, including things such as haircuts and beautician fees. Any spending or service that is necessary would be pulled from here. If either partner chooses to save their "fun" money for something special, that is their prerogative. If one of them spends their "fun" money before the end of the week, they would have to suffer.

Three months later, we met with Michelle and Andrew again. They had been able to take a vacation for the first time in many years and the couple no longer argued about finances. You see, their budget met all their needs.

Another couple we worked with, Ronnie and Sherry, never budgeted, because Ryan made less money than his wife and he felt embarrassed. We discussed how Ryan did not need to be embarrassed but that Sherry wanted him to know what their financial state was. She recognized

that what she earned was not hers, but it belonged to both of them. When they started budgeting, the relief on their faces was so memorable, as Ronnie and Sherry were able to save nearly \$3,000 monthly. Ronnie had no idea but was pleasantly surprised and thankful.

Pray on the Topic Together

Only God knows what our future holds. If you include Him in on your financial planning, He will give you wisdom. Have you ever wanted to purchase something that you were unsure of? If so, you pray about it, and the next day you wonder how you ever thought that it was a good idea in the first place. Simply acknowledging God in your finances invites Him to direct your paths.

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight.”

– Proverbs 3:5-6 (NASB)

Tithe

Tithing is a command. When we tithe, we show God that we will be obedient, even in our giving. When we do, God says he will rebuke the Devil for us. When we give, we will reap what we have sown. God will bless our finances simply because we are blessing others with what we have.

“‘Bring all the tithes into the storehouse so there will be enough food in my Temple. If you do,’ says the Lord of Heaven’s Armies, ‘I will open the windows of heaven for you. I will pour out a blessing so great you won’t have enough room to take it in! Try it! Put me to the test! Your crops will be abundant, for I will guard them from insects and disease. Your grapes will not fall from the vine before they are ripe,’ says the Lord of Heaven’s Armies.”

– Malachi 3:10-11 (NLT)

Conclusion

We believe that great marriages do exist and can exist. You don’t have to be amongst the fifty percent of divorced couples. My husband and I have been married for twenty-seven years and the principles in this book have not only been used by us but have also been taught to hundreds of

other couples. The only thing that is needed to bring change is commitment and willingness to do something different than what you have done.

Don't take your marriage for granted; treat it as a gift, because the Bible says that a husband "who finds a wife finds a good thing" (Proverbs 18:22). In other words, God has blessed you. What God has blessed you with, he would expect you to care for. The good news is that you are not alone; the Holy Spirit will guide and direct your steps. We believe that this could be a new beginning for your marriage.

Acknowledgments

Pastor Chris and Pastor Angie wish to thank God for bringing us together and helping us through all of the rough times that prepared us for this season. We are so thankful for the desire that He has placed in our hearts to help strengthen marriages. We consider it an honor to be able to speak into the lives of couples that desire to have a better relationship. When we invited couples into our home to help them with their troubles, we had no idea that God was preparing us to help in this way.

Thank you to Dr. Angela Lauria and The Author Incubator team for helping us bring this book to reality. Thanks to our church family at Spirit of Love Ministries for giving of yourselves to support this vision. We could have never accomplished this without you all. A special thanks to Pastor Pamela Edwards for always speaking life into us. What a kingdom connection.

About the Authors



Angela Yousey and her husband, Chris, co-pastor at the Spirit of Love Ministries in Columbus, Ohio. For nearly twenty-seven years, they worked with couples and families, providing them with sound, Biblical counseling. They first started with small groups in their home, per the request of a few struggling couples.

The groups grew so large that people

would sit on the floor. Because of their dedication and ability to deliver a message of hope, their following evolved into a church that launched in 2018. Angela loves helping people, and her career choice was a registered nurse. She practiced in her career for twenty-eight years.

Angela and her husband were both divorced when they met. They understood what it took to overcome the emotional pain of divorce after living through it. Angela felt that all of her struggles and pain were part of God's plan. She said that, even as a child, she knew she would one day help marriages. When she met her husband, she found that he also desired to help restore marriages. Angela and Chris were able to blend their two families together into a loving one. Together, they have six sons and six grandchildren. Four of their sons served in the United States Armed Forces, and one earned a full football scholarship to the University of Toledo. Their last son is currently being recruited by several Division I colleges for football. Angela's story is a demonstration of the power of love, unity, and grace.

Thank You

Thank you for taking the time to read our book! We desire that you will be successful in your marriage. We believe that you can have the marriage of your dreams. If you would like to reach us, you can do so easily at www.therealmarriage.com or on Facebook @theRealmarriage.