



YOU CAN HAVE A HAPPY FAMILY

Steps to Enjoying Your Marriage and Children

Amanda Beth

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Amanda Beth
P.O. Box 183796
Shelby Township, MI 48318-3796
Email: authoramandabeth@gmail.com

Website: www.amandabeth.net
Blog: www.sharingtruths.com
Twitter: www.twitter.com/abdaubs
LinkedIn: www.linkedin.com/in/authoramandabeth
Facebook: www.facebook.com/author.amandabeth

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PRAISES FOR “YOU CAN HAVE A HAPPY FAMILY”

I learn best from one’s example & not when given a list of “do’s” and “don’ts.” Amanda has graciously opened up the things that held her captive in her marriage and in raising children and offers the key (God’s Word) to show us how we can be set free.

—*Lesleigh Noonkester*

Mom and pastor’s wife at First Baptist Church in Sibley, IA

Psychologists and PhD’s usually author marriage and family books. They base their information for their books on research and experience counseling clients. Amanda wrote “*YOU CAN HAVE A HAPPY FAMILY*” from the trenches. When Amanda writes about discipline or sacrifice or intimacy or marital relationships you can take her advice to the bank for two reasons: 1) She lives what she writes every day. As a thirty-something stay-at-home mother of four (from a toddler to a preteen) she writes about her own experiences, her successes and her failures. Her transparent candid informal writing style puts readers in the midst of her life. 2) She writes from a deeply felt commitment to allow the Lord to show her and teach her what His will is for her marriage and family.

—*Steven Sawyer*

Editor and writer

In this very special book, Amanda Beth has taken her true life stories that God used to draw her and her family closer to Him, and turned them into an amazing teaching tool. I have learned many things that will not only help my marriage but my life.

—*Chaplain Dave Moore*

Author of *The Father’s Love*

Amanda is both gifted and anointed to write. This book contains God's truths presented in a way that is easy to read and remember, that is through real life stories, testimonies, surveys and exhortations. This book will help you become a better and a more practical husband/wife, dad/mum, and a better person as a whole. It will absolutely change you and leave a mark on you that can't be erased for the glory of God.

—Daniel Simwawa
Author

In “*YOU CAN HAVE A HAPPY FAMILY - Steps to Enjoying Your Marriage and Children*,” author Amanda Beth takes you on a journey to discovering true Christian values of a family. The abundant life God intends for every believer by identifying spiritual strongholds and removing all obstacles that hinder you from enjoying all the benefits of a happy family. I must say that this book could change your total perspective on how to measure success in your life and church.

—Pastor Saqib Munawar
Founder and chairman of *Christ for All Nations Ministries*

Amanda has a unique ability to use Bible knowledge, personal experience and godly insight to address the challenges of marriage with frankness and compassion. She is also very open about her own family experiences, which adds a compelling element to her work. I enjoyed her book.

—Warren Baldwin
Author of *Roaring Lions, Cracking Rocks and Other Gems From Proverbs*

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***...I came that they may have and enjoy life, and have it
in abundance (to the full, till it overflows).***

—John 10:10, AMP

INTRODUCTION

A HAPPY FAMILY – WHAT HAPPINESS MEANS

I

have a happy marriage and a happy family. This doesn't mean I have a perfect marriage and my children are perfect. The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines happiness as "*a state of well-being and contentment,*" and "*a pleasurable or satisfying experience.*"¹

I am completely content and satisfied with my marriage and my children. But it wasn't always that way. It took small steps each day in many areas to produce the results I am seeing today. In this book, I will share with you the steps God took me through, and the areas in which He has worked, and continues to work, in my family. I will also share with you other families' testimonies and how they overcame their struggles.

Even though my family is not perfect, we have come a long way in our growth that it is now apparent to others. People often tell us our marriage and family looks joyful and loving. Those compliments are an affirmation we are finally walking in the right direction.

What God has done in my life, my marriage, and my family, He wants to do for you. All you need is a willing heart and perseverance, which God will supply, so you will not be on your own. The rewards are endless and worth more than anything you have to go through to get there. God is not partial to anyone. What He does for one, He will do for others. God wants to bring you to a place of true contentment and joy, no matter what situation you are in today.

We love because he first loved us.
—1 John 4:19

CHAPTER ONE

LOVE – YOU CAN'T GIVE WHAT YOU DON'T HAVE

Seeking Happiness

M

ost fights earlier in my marriage stemmed from my insecurity. I was insecure about my looks, my body, and my personality. I had emotional problems, and I didn't like myself. Therefore, I was hard to get along with. I made my marriage miserable at times and my husband felt helpless and prayed for God to help me.

Despite my attitude and eagerness to quarrel, my husband committed to loving me and refused to give up on me. Even though he continued to express his love for me, I couldn't receive his love because I didn't love myself. My husband's love never seemed enough for me. I always felt there was something missing, but I didn't know what it was. I desperately wanted to be happy, but didn't know how.

So I began seeking happiness in the approval of others. The more attention I received, the better I felt. I started focusing on my looks and impressing others to boost my self-image. But there never seemed to be enough attention to satisfy me. The more I sought acceptance and approval from others, the deeper I fell into sin.

I ended up getting into a situation that could have cost me my marriage. It opened my eyes to see I was searching in the wrong direction. It was not where I wanted to go. I knew if I didn't change direction I was going to destroy my marriage. That was the wake-up call I needed to seek a change of direction and turn to God.

I always knew there was a God out there somewhere, but I never knew Him. I never knew God desired to have a close relationship with me. I never knew He had a plan laid out for my life. I never knew He had all the answers and the way to resolve my problems.

I had been living my life with no purpose and no direction. No wonder I was a mess. God rescued me from destroying myself, my marriage, my family, and my future.

Discovering God's Love

God attracted me to a family I knew loved the Lord. His love was apparent

in their marriage and their relationships with their children. Their love for the Lord influenced me to attend their church. When I first walked into their church I felt God's loving presence there. I felt like I truly belonged.

They taught the Truth from the Bible which drew me closer to God. As I spent time in His Word, learning from Him, talking to Him in prayer, and growing into a close relationship with Him, I began to see how great His love was for me. God showed me the love and acceptance I had longed for, and He showed me it would be found only in Him.

God showed me through the Bible how valuable I was, and how precious and beautiful I was to Him. He showed me He created me and walked with me every day imploring me to turn to Him. He showed me whenever I fell into sin He was there ready to pull me out.

He reached down from on high and took hold of me; he drew me out of deep waters. He rescued me from my powerful enemy, from my foes, who were too strong for me. They confronted me in the day of my disaster, but the LORD was my support. He brought me out into a spacious place; He rescued me because he delighted in me.

—Psalm 18:16-19

God has always loved me the way I wanted to be loved. I didn't need to search for love in anyone or anything. God has always been there eagerly waiting for me to receive His love.

God began to reveal to me the situations I was putting myself in. The crowd I wanted to be a part of, the choices I was making, and the thoughts I was having were not of Him. He opened my eyes and showed me the sin I wanted to be in was hurting me and my family. But most of all, it was hurting Him. God doesn't want to see us hurt ourselves. He deeply loves us and longs to protect us from everything that is harmful to us.

It was life changing once I learned God was for me and not against me. God wanted to protect me. He wanted to guide me. I didn't have to live life on my own. I didn't have to be perfect and prove myself to get acceptance. I could come to God just the way I was, and He'd still love me unconditionally. I could then be free to love myself as God saw me. And I could receive His love to pour out on my family.

We cannot love our spouses, our children, or anyone else without receiving

God's love, because He is the author of love. 1 John 4:19 says, "We love because he first loved us." I couldn't give my family the love they needed when I didn't love myself. I couldn't love them when I didn't know I was dearly loved and worth something. Each one of us is valuable and precious in God's sight, but if we don't know that, how can we truly value and love others?

God created us because He loves us more than anyone can love us. He didn't create us so we can live miserable lives, struggling every day. He created us to walk in an intimate relationship with Him, and live a life dependent on Him.

God gives His love to us, but we have to receive it. We first receive His love by receiving Jesus Christ as our Savior. We receive Jesus by believing God gave His Son to die in our place for our sins. God raised Him back to life so we could be born again, adopted as God's children, with a right standing relationship with Him.

If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in him and he in God. And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him.

—1 John 4:15-16

When we receive Jesus, God's Holy Spirit comes to live in us. God continues to fill us with His Spirit to convict, teach, guide, and empower us to do His will. Jesus said in John 14:26, "But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you."

We then rely on God's Spirit to work His love in us as Romans 5:5 explains, "...because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us." God can start working His love in us the moment we receive Jesus. As we experience His love, and see it working in our lives, we can then give it to others.

1 John 4:7-8 says, "...let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love." No matter how much I tried, I couldn't love myself, my husband, or anyone else without knowing and receiving God's love.

Verses 9 and 10 go on to say, "This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This

is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.”

All our sins are forgiven! The Bible says that all wrongdoing is sin (1 John 5:17). What greater love in this world can we receive than the love from the One who takes away our sins, knows our wrongdoings and still loves us? There is nothing greater than God’s love.

So many people are suffering in this world. They are turning to drugs, alcohol, sex, and other vices, seeking to fill the void every one of us has. This is the void that only God’s love can fill. This void is there because of man’s separation from God through sin. This is why we need Jesus; He is the only One who can fill that void.

And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

—Ephesians 1:22-23

I have watched loved ones destroy their lives and their children’s lives by turning toward drugs or alcohol to fill their void. They become addicted because it’s never enough to fill the void permanently. They try to fill it, but it quickly runs out, so they continue to numb their pain daily.

By receiving Jesus, God permanently filled the void in me. He filled it and keeps it full so I will never need to fill it with anything else. He is more than enough. By spending time daily with Him, and following His will for my life, He keeps His love flowing through me to give to my family.

I can now rest assured that my days are taken care of, that I have my Heavenly Father directing my steps, caring for me, and watching over my family. He tells me when to shut my mouth. He corrects me when I’m being unkind to my family. And He’s teaching me to be a better wife and mother. Nothing in this world could ever give me the love, joy, and peace I have knowing God loves me and cares for me.

God’s Road

Now looking back, I see my life as a road, and God was following me, speaking to me with every step I took. “Don’t turn there, there are many pits,” He warned me. “Don’t go down that road, it’s dangerous. You’re going to hurt

yourself. Turn here. This is where you'll find safety, protection, and all the blessings I have laid up for you. All the provisions you will need, all the love, joy and contentment you can find are here. This is where you will be truly satisfied."

Yet in my pride I didn't listen. Instead I said, "No, this road makes sense. This looks like the fun road. This is the way everyone is going. Let me follow them. This is what I need and want."

Therefore, He went with me in tears because He knew the road I was traveling would cause me pain. He followed me so when I came to the end of myself and had nothing left, He would carry me back to the road He had prepared for me.

But if you do not listen, I will weep in secret because of your pride; my eyes will weep bitterly, overflowing with tears, because the LORD's flock will be taken captive.

—Jeremiah 13:17

God loves you so much. Whatever road you are on today, He is walking with you, waiting to take you where you belong—the road He has prepared for you. It can all begin with you. One willing heart can change a whole family and change future generations. Through your obedience, you can have a positive impact on your family, overcoming the negative.

As you allow God to work in you, your family will see the difference and desire that change. As I changed, my husband changed with me. God's work has a trickling down effect. The more I continue to change, the more my husband wants to change. That's the power God's love has.

You can't change other people. Only God can. So let Him start with you. Turn to God and see that He loves you and wants to guide you in your marriage, and raising your children.

Good and upright is the LORD; therefore he instructs sinners in his ways. He guides the humble in what is right and teaches them his way.

—Psalm 25:8-9

Allow God to fill you with His love and watch that trickling down effect in

your own family. God wants to transform your family and give you the happiness, joy, and contentment you desire. He's just waiting on you!

***...forgive whatever grievances you may have against
one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.
—Colossians 3:13***

CHAPTER TWO

FORGIVENESS – RECEIVING AND GIVING

Forgiving Ourselves

E

ven though I learned God loved me, and forgave me of my sins, I still continued to feel guilty all the time. My desires changed, so I didn't want to act the way I used to and do the things I used to. Yet I found myself falling back into the same patterns of behavior I despised.

The Apostle Paul stated this same thing in Romans 7:18-19, "I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing."

Like Paul, and everyone else, we have this flesh to live in and it has a sinful nature. So what is the answer to conquering our sinful nature? How do we overcome our flesh? Paul gives us the answer in the following verses:

What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!

—Romans 7:24-25

Jesus has already provided everything we need to overcome sin. Through Him, we can overcome our flesh and our old way of living. We do this by setting our minds on Him and relying on His power (not our own) to help us work out areas in our flesh that keep popping up and controlling us.

Romans 8:6 says, "The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace." We will be at peace when our minds are on God and we trust Him to work in us. We will not be at peace when we are filled with condemnation.

There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death.

—Romans 8:1-2, KJV

In Jesus we are no longer condemned. Jesus bore all the sins we have committed, and will ever commit, on the cross (Isaiah 53:6). Therefore we don't have to feel condemned when God convicts us of sin.

God convicts us to make us aware so we can confess and turn to Him for help in overcoming our sins, which is repentance. Condemnation, however, keeps us feeling guilty in our sins. Romans 5:16 states, "...The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation, but the gift followed many trespasses and brought justification."

We are justified in Christ and truly set free from the power of sin. This doesn't mean we take sin lightly and deliberately continue in it. We would be foolish to do that, and would only be opening the door to the enemy (Satan) and hinder God's power in us.

For if we go on deliberately and willingly sinning after once acquiring the knowledge of the Truth, there is no longer any sacrifice left to atone for [our] sins [no further offering to which to look forward]. [There is nothing left for us then] but a kind of awful and fearful prospect and expectation of divine judgment and the fury of burning wrath and indignation which will consume those who put themselves in opposition [to God].

—Hebrews 10:26-27, AMP

If we refuse to turn from our sins, we stand with the enemy and make ourselves an enemy to God. I don't think any of us want to do that. God knows our hearts. He knows when we truly want to turn away from sin and follow Him. But we also can't do it without His help.

I recently read a journal entry I wrote when I first learned about God. I was planning on committing myself to being a true follower of Christ, I wrote in the journal, but I had a lot of changing to do first. I listed everything I thought was wrong with me so I could work on those areas before I lived for Christ.

Years later I discovered we have to commit ourselves to Christ first for Him to change us, not the other way around, as Paul explained:

Are you so foolish and so senseless and so silly? Having begun [your new life spiritually] with the [Holy] Spirit, are you now reaching perfection [by dependence] on the flesh?

—Galatians 3:3, AMP

Before I learned this, I tried so hard to change myself, and yet I was constantly living on edge. I was like a ticking time bomb ready to explode the moment I got up and acted worse every day. I couldn't understand why I wasn't changing when I tried so hard to be good. I even prayed for God to protect my children from me. I didn't want them to be affected by my bad examples.

Then one day, while feeling worn down and depressed because I wasn't changing, God gave me a revelation that changed my life. He showed me I couldn't change myself. I needed to commit myself to Him and allow Him to do what needed to be done in me. He showed me if I would put my trust in Him, He would be faithful to work in me.

You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace. But by faith we eagerly await through the Spirit the righteousness for which we hope.

—Galatians 5:4-5

Instead of putting my faith in God, and relying on His Spirit to change me, I was relying on my flesh to change me, which was impossible. God saw my heart and knew I didn't want to act the way I was acting. He saw I was making an effort to turn from it. But I needed His strength to do the rest—what we can't do on our own. At that moment I felt a weight lifted off me, and from that day I slowly began to change.

Hebrews 4:15-16 says, “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.”

Jesus knows our weaknesses because He experienced our same temptations, yet He did not sin. Because we have a sinful flesh, when we receive Jesus into our lives we don't instantly act like Him. It takes a process of working with God to stop doing the things we used to do and start doing what we were created to do.

For instance, Colossians 3:5-8 says to put to death whatever belongs to our earthly nature, which is our flesh. It explains how we must rid ourselves of those

things. Therefore, we still have a part. But we also cannot do it on our own. We need God's power to help us. We have to work together as one with Him.

When I learned this, I could forgive myself each time I fell instead of walking around feeling condemned. If I slipped and lost my temper, I confessed it to God and received His forgiveness, which helped me turn from it (1 John 1:9). The more I did this, the less it became a struggle.

Now whenever I slip, I don't allow myself to feel condemnation, which is guilt and heaviness. Instead, I thank God that He is working in me, even when I fall. By knowing God loves me, regardless of how I behave, it strengthens my faith to trust Him and allow Him to work in me. This frees me to focus on loving my husband and children, while trusting God to work out the wrong in me.

...But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love.

—Galatians 5:13

Once I started relying on Jesus to change me, I began seeing the Holy Spirit developing His fruit in me. There were situations when I thought, *“Wow, I responded that way? Where did that come from? I would have never responded like that in the past.”*

Jesus' fruit were finally starting to form in me. The fruit of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23) were all character traits I wanted to display, but wasn't able to do on my own.

Jesus said:

Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.

—John 15:4-5

By knowing all these virtues are already in me through Jesus, and as I rely on God to develop them, God lifts the burden of guilt. I now can enjoy relying on God each day to teach me, strengthen me, and guide me as He produces His

fruit in my life.

Galatians 5:16 says to live by the Spirit, and we will not gratify the desires of our sinful nature. This means to yield to God's Spirit in us and not to our flesh. For example, when I am being rude or unkind, I get uncomfortable and know in my mind to shut my mouth or apologize. If I yield to that, then I am living by the Spirit. But if I choose to ignore it, to gratify my fleshly desires, then I am living in my flesh.

It's always good to listen to that still small voice, but many times my flesh is so loud it drowns it out. That is when I need to repent and receive God's help. The more we yield to the Spirit, the more fruit God can develop in us and the more we will walk in love.

No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.

—Hebrews 12:11

Forgiving Others

Once you receive God's forgiveness, and forgive yourself, God can help you forgive others. Forgiving others isn't easy and doesn't come naturally to us. We have to purposely choose to forgive, which is where we need God's help.

Through the years, my husband and I have had several things we needed to forgive each other for. I am amazed that things I couldn't let go of for years didn't bother me once I learned to forgive. The same goes for my husband. I confessed things I knew were not pleasing to him, and I was shocked he forgave me with loving arms. We have also learned that truly forgiving means we don't keep bringing up our past mistakes. Once we give it to God, we don't keep taking it back from Him by thinking about it over and over again.

This didn't happen overnight, but as we gave these areas to God to work out, He prepared our hearts to confess and forgive. God will lead you and heal you in forgiveness. You just have to follow His leading and timing. Pray and ask God to guide you when you have an area you need to confess to your spouse or anyone you may have hurt.

It's also important that you don't allow yourself to continue feeling guilty once you have turned from your sin and given it over to God. If the one you hurt keeps bringing it up, be gentle and pray for God to work forgiveness in their heart, and remind yourself you have been forgiven. Some people want you to take back what you can't possibly take back. This is why it's important you forgive yourself, even if the person you hurt doesn't forgive you.

If you are the one who needs to forgive someone, God wants to heal your wounds. I have been on both sides: being the one hurt, and being the one hurting someone else. I can tell you that being the one doing the hurting was more painful than being hurt. The remorse of never being able to take back what you have done, and having no control to turn back time and make things right, is one of the worst feelings in the world. So most likely, the one who hurt you is hurting as well.

Paul talks about forgiveness for the sinner in 2 Corinthians 2:7-8. He explains, "Now instead, you ought to forgive and comfort him, so that he will not be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. I urge you, therefore, to reaffirm your love for him." God forgives us and reaffirms His love for us. We need to do the same for others.

In Matthew 18:21-35, Jesus told the parable of the unmerciful servant. A king's servant begged his king to have mercy on him and not sell him and his family to pay off a debt which he owed to the king in the amount of 10,000 talents. The king had mercy on him, forgave all his debt, and set him free. The servant then went out and when he found one of his fellow servants, who owed him only 100 denarii, he demanded payment and didn't show him mercy.

My Bible commentary says 10,000 talents is equivalent to millions of dollars, and 100 denarii is equivalent to only a few dollars. Learning this put me under conviction. How much have I done in my life to offend God, and even hurt others, compared to someone who does only a few things to offend or hurt me? Why would I not forgive others for their few offenses when I have been forgiven for millions of offenses?

For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.

—Matthew 6:14-15

We need our sins forgiven, so we need to forgive others. Matthew 18:35 says that we must forgive from our hearts. Knowing I'm forgiven for all my sins, even though I don't deserve it, helps me willingly forgive others for their offenses toward me.

Forgiveness doesn't mean the other person is off the hook and you don't feel the pain they've caused you. Forgiveness is choosing to give that person over to God because He knows how to work it out.

You have seen, O LORD, the wrong done to me. Uphold my cause!

—Lamentations 3:59

When you hold on to unforgiveness, you allow that person to hurt you over and over, and prevent your own healing. Holding onto unforgiveness keeps you wrapped up in conflict with the person instead of focusing on the healing God has prepared for you. It keeps you wallowing in that hurt instead of moving forward and seeing the good God can bring from it.

Unforgiveness is a dead end. There's no way out. It doesn't make the

problem go away. It keeps you stuck in it. This is where I believe a lot of couples hit a wall in their marriage. They try to work on their marriage on their own without allowing God to heal them and work forgiveness in their hearts.

Therefore, the wall continues expanding. The wall needs to be torn down first so they can move forward and heal their marriage.

One major area that needs to be dealt with is healing from childhood hurts. If you were abused as a child, you have to allow God to heal your wounds and help you forgive. This may take time, but God is faithful to fully heal you if you put your trust in Him.

If you were raised in a dysfunctional home, or abandoned by your parents, you have to allow yourself to forgive their mistakes. If you don't, you are allowing your parents to hurt you as an adult all over again. This will affect your children and how you raise them. You don't have to allow your parents' wrong choices to hurt your family. Instead, you can learn from their mistakes and choose not to make those same mistakes in your family.

As I surveyed parents for this book, I found that many of those who were mistreated as children committed to raising their children differently. They chose not to do the same things their parents did to them. I often see parents doing the same wrong things their parents did, and it continues from generation to generation without changing. You do have a choice. Everyone has a choice. These parents chose to do the right thing and stop their childhood mistreatment and dysfunction from spreading to their children.

No matter what has happened in your childhood, you can choose to give your children a great life. You can choose to change the future generations. Exodus 20:5-6 says that God visits the sins of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Him. But He shows mercy to a thousand generations of those that love Him and keep His commandments. This shows how our sins can continue from generation to generation until one person makes a choice to turn to God and allow Him to impact a thousand times more generations for good instead of bad.

It may feel like it's too hard to forgive, but it's a lot harder to live your life holding on to unforgiveness. When you are carrying it with you every day, it weighs you down and affects everyone around you. I carried it with me for many years and it was literally killing me. Finally I had to hand that weight over to God and allow Him to heal me. God wants to heal every wound we have ever received. We just have to be willing to give it to Him.

He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds [curing their pains and their sorrows].

—Psalm 147:3, AMP

Several people in my life have hurt me deeply. I found when I truly gave them over to God, and started praying for them instead of being angry, I began feeling sympathy for them. I saw them in a different light. I realized the reason they hurt me was because they were hurt.

When you truly release your hurt to God, He shows you the hurt in others' lives and helps you love them instead of hating them. This is how God treats us. He sees past our sins and sees our hurts and loves us.

I was hurting my family because I was hurting in many areas, including unforgiveness toward myself and others. Once God helped me through those hurts, I was able to love those who were hard to get along with, because I knew they were hurting inside. I could pray for them instead of judging them and returning the hurt, which only adds to their pain and makes them worse.

Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

—Romans 12:21

When we start to love and bless those who hurt us, the bitterness melts away and God's love comes pouring into our hearts. This may not be easy to do at first, but it's a choice we must make. We can't wait until we feel like it, because we won't feel like it until after we choose to do it.

God has a great plan for you and your family, but you'll never experience it if your heart is filled with unforgiveness. Once God helped me forgive myself, and those who hurt me, doors of opportunities started opening up in my life. Allow God to do the same for you so you can truly enjoy a life free from the burden of unforgiveness weighing you down.

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

CHAPTER THREE

THE REAL ENEMY – OUT TO DESTROY YOUR FAMILY

Our Adversary

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e have a real enemy who wants to destroy us, our marriages, and our children. John 10:10 says the thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. The real enemy is not your spouse, nor anyone else. Ephesians 6:12 says, “For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.”

The real enemy is Satan and his mission is to destroy us. How does he destroy us? He knows our weaknesses better than we do. He uses our weaknesses and the weaknesses of others to tempt us to sin. When we give in to that temptation we open the door to his influence.

Satan uses any means he can to get a foothold into our lives. Once he’s in, he knows he can gain a stronghold on us and work to destroy us. In today’s society, he has many avenues for temptation. But we don’t have to allow him to succeed. We have the power—not him.

Little children, you are of God [you belong to Him] and have [already] defeated and overcome them [the agents of the antichrist], because He Who lives in you is greater (mightier) than he who is in the world.

—1 John 4:4, AMP

Through Jesus, we have power over Satan and his spiritual forces. Jesus said in Luke 10:18-20, “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you. However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.”

The only weapon Satan has is deception. So the only authority he has is what we give him when we follow his deception. Romans 6:16 explains, “Don’t you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey—whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to

death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness?”

This is why Satan has so much control over the world, because people are unknowingly giving him power by following his deception and allowing him to work in their lives (2 Timothy 2:26). I never realized I had opened the door to Satan’s influence when I wasn’t living in obedience to God daily.

The Bible instructs us to:

Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings.
—1 Peter 5:8-9

So how do we resist the devil, Satan? To resist doesn’t mean to turn away and ignore something exists. To resist means to boldly fight against something, to stand firm against it. Genesis 4:7 explains how to resist Satan: “If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it.” Since Jesus already mastered sin for us, we resist Satan by putting our faith in Jesus. We resist him by turning away from sin and following God’s Spirit in us. We resist him by yielding to the Spirit and using self-control instead of yielding to our temptations. When we do fall into one of Satan’s traps, which we all do, God is there to lift us out. We just pick ourselves up and continue following God, standing firm in our faith, over which Satan has no authority.

Though he falls, he shall not be utterly cast down, for the Lord grasps his hand in support and upholds him.

—Psalm 37:24, AMP

We can deny God’s hand and stay in Satan’s traps and allow him to destroy us. Or we can allow God to bring us out of the traps and into safety. Through Jesus, we have everything we need to turn away from sin and resist the devil. 1 John 3:8 explains, “He who does what is sinful is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil’s work.”

With divorce rates almost as high in Christian families as non-Christian

families, we need to wake up and see we are falling into Satan's traps. Revelation 12:17 says Satan wages war against those who obey God's commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus. We need to be aware we are being attacked and take a stand and fight to protect our marriages, and our families, by following Jesus in everything.

...woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has gone down to you! He is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short.

—Revelation 12:12

The Bible tells us we are Christ's bride, which means we are dear to Him. Satan wants to destroy anything that is valuable and precious to God, His precious creation. Satan's goal is to persuade us to rebel against God, because he knows when our hearts are obedient to God, we have great power over Satan's works here on earth.

Our Responsibilities

Satan uses our weaknesses to tempt us. If we don't stand against him and turn away from temptation, in time he will gain a stronghold on us. This is why the Bible tells us to resist him at his onset (1 Peter 5:9, AMP). Once we allow him in, he works to destroy us.

When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.

—James 1:13-15

Though Satan is the enticer, notice it says our own evil desires open the door to sin. So he is not the only one to blame. We have a personal responsibility as well.

For instance, James 1:27 tells us to keep ourselves from being polluted by the world. We have a responsibility to guard ourselves from things that are destructive to us and our families. Proverbs 4:25, 27 warn us, "Let your eyes look straight ahead, fix your gaze directly before you. Do not swerve to the right or the left; keep your foot from evil."

If we want to have power over the enemy's attacks and have the life Jesus died to give us, we have to keep our minds and hearts focused on God and His will, without compromise. Even a little side step off the path could hurl us over the edge and destroy us and our families.

The Bible warns:

Do not set foot on the path of the wicked or walk in the way of evil men. Avoid it, do not travel on it; turn from it and go on your way. For they cannot sleep till they do evil; they are robbed of slumber till they make someone fall.

—Proverbs 4:14-16

God gives us these warnings because He knows what makes us stumble and what leads to sin and strongholds in our lives. He knows Satan will use anything he can to make us fall. God wants to protect us and keep us safe.

We can't surround ourselves every day with bad influences and not expect them to affect us. We are foolish to think we are immune. For instance, I have worked in places where my co-workers constantly yelled and complained. As hard as I tried to block it out, I found myself complaining and yelling too.

Proverbs 22:24-25 tells us not to make friends with a hot-tempered man. It says not to associate with one easily angered or we may learn his ways and get ourselves ensnared. We need to associate with people who will help us grow, not infect us and entice us to sin.

Television, books, and music also can be detrimental influences. I can't watch the same kind of shows I used to watch, listen to the same music I used to listen to, or read the books I used to read, without allowing them to fill my mind with worldly junk. What we feed our minds affects our actions and we often don't realize it.

I have heard people say watching immoral shows and movies doesn't bother them or affect them. Even if you don't feel like it affects you, it does. The more junk we allow in, the less we are able to discern the voice of God and we hinder His fruit from developing in us. These negative things we allow in are like weeds that choke the fruit in our lives.

Once I started turning away from things that were not beneficial for me, I began to see this truth. The more I turn away, the closer I grow to God because He is now the main thing occupying my mind. There isn't a bunch of junk fighting for that place in my mind.

You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

—Ephesians 4:22-24

Whatever we feed our eyes will go into our minds. We can't put on our new selves and renew our minds when we are constantly suffocating God's Word with all the junk we put in us.

This is why we also need to monitor what our children read, watch, and listen to for entertainment. The more we allow ourselves to be influenced by the

world, the more we will take on its character. The more we allow ourselves to be influenced by God, the more we will take on His character. It's that simple. Yet we often don't want to give those things up, even though they are only hurting us.

The Bible tells us to be on guard and set our minds on what is right, pure, and holy. What goes in must come out. Romans 8:5 says, "Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires."

This shows us wherever the mind leads, the body will follow. If our minds are on God, we will follow His ways. If our minds are on the world, we will follow their ways. It's inevitable. If we want God's best for our families, we have to take responsibility and guard our minds.

Adultery

If thoughts of sexual immorality tempt you, you need to catch those thoughts at the beginning and guard your mind against them. A person who commits adultery doesn't wake up one day and choose to have an affair. It first starts in the mind, with flirting and lustful thoughts. If it progresses unchecked, it gains a stronghold so when the temptation comes they are too weak to fight it. Or, their desire becomes so strong they don't want to fight it.

We need to recognize and flee from this temptation from the start. First Corinthians 6:18 tells us to flee from sexual immorality. The Amplified Bible says to shun immorality and all sexual looseness, and flee from impurity in thought, word, or deed. We need to flee from it in every way because we can't stand against it. Our flesh is too weak.

Jesus said in Matthew 5:29, "If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away." In other words, get rid of anything that causes you to stumble, anything that will feed the temptation and keep it alive in you.

Let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.

—Hebrews 12:1

Stop doing things to feed that weakness so it is no longer a temptation. If you don't feed something, it will eventually die. Be aggressive, lay it down and get rid of it. Stop feeding it completely!

So many people think, "*Well, I can look as long as I don't touch.*" However, Jesus said in Matthew 5:28, "But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart."

This tells us the mind is where it starts. This verse applies to everyone; both men and women. Lust doesn't always mean thinking about someone's physical body. We can lust by thinking excessively about someone, going out of our way to see them, or trying to impress them.

I also learned when I would try to entice men with my appearance I was just as guilty as those who lusted. If we continue to allow anyone other than our

spouses to occupy our minds it will eventually cause a stronghold. We are giving our hearts away. If we don't stop, it will destroy our marriages.

Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral.

—Hebrews 13:4

God gives us warnings for our own good. If we don't heed those warnings, He gives us over to our wrong desires, which lead to death and destruction in us, and in our relationships. Romans 6:21 expresses, "What benefit did you reap at that time from the things you are now ashamed of? Those things result in death!"

The Bible is full of warnings against adultery and shares the repercussions it causes. Proverbs 7:25-26 says, "Do not let your heart turn to her ways or stray into her paths. Many are the victims she has brought down; her slain are a mighty throng." Verse 21 shows how appealing Satan makes it: "With persuasive words she led him astray; she seduced him with her smooth talk." And verse 22-23 says how he followed her, "little knowing it will cost him his life."

When sin is full grown it gives birth to death. Death is darkness. Jesus said in John 8:12, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." He also said in John 12:35, "The man who walks in the dark does not know where he is going."

Without Jesus' light guiding us, we stumble trying to find our way in the dark. We cover His light by continuing to walk in our flesh. Proverbs 6:32-33 explains, "But a man who commits adultery lacks judgment; whoever does so destroys himself. Blows and disgrace are his lot, and his shame will never be wiped away."

There is so much at stake for just a moment of what is disguised as pleasure, but is in reality, full of pain and destruction. This is why it is important to stop it where it begins.

King David wrote:

I will be careful to lead a blameless life...I will walk in my house with blameless heart. I will set before my eyes no vile thing....

—Psalm 101:2-3

King David knew first-hand what looking and lusting could lead to after he committed adultery with Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11). He knew all the pain he caused and all those who suffered because of his actions. Adultery doesn't just affect us. It also affects our families, the other person and their family as well.

Fighting Temptation

If you struggle in this area, be encouraged that God will never leave you to struggle in your temptations. He will always provide a way out, as 1 Corinthians 10:13 says, “No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.”

The Holy Spirit reminds us and helps us turn away from temptations, and helps us put to death those temptations (Romans 8:13). But if we don’t take His way out and don’t rely on God to help us, we will reap the consequences.

One man I surveyed said he wished he would have been more holy in his approach to sexual temptation. He expressed, “While not what I would consider diving into sin, ‘flirting’ with temptation makes withdrawals from my emotional connection with my wife.”

Even though it was only in thought and never led to action, it still caused him to detach emotionally from his wife. This is how powerful this stronghold is. It pulls our hearts away from our spouses and God.

If you have a weakness in this area, whenever temptation arises, start thinking of your spouse right away. Think about what attracts you to them instead, and feed yourself those right thoughts. Remember, whatever you feed your mind will affect your actions. Replace wrong thoughts with right thoughts and think of your spouse sexually. It keeps your attraction fixated solely on your spouse, as God commanded it to be.

One man said one of the ways he contributes to the success of his marriage is that he tries to think about his wife all day. One woman said one of the reasons her marriage has been successful for ten years now is that their physical attraction is still strong. “We keep that part of our marriage very healthy,” she said.

This is how God created us, to enjoy each other and to keep that special gift between husband and wife alone.

Drink water from your own cistern, running water from your own well. Should your springs overflow in the streets, your streams of

water in the public squares? Let them be yours alone, never to be shared with strangers.

—Proverbs 5:15-17

Think about when a body of water overflows and goes where it's not intended. I have never seen a flood that didn't leave behind a mess or a disaster. This is how it is when we pour ourselves where we are not supposed to be. It undoubtedly creates a mess.

May your fountain be blessed, and may you rejoice in the wife of your youth. A loving doe, a graceful deer—may her breasts satisfy you always, may you ever be captivated by her love. Why be captivated, my son, by an adulteress? Why embrace the bosom of another man's wife?

—Proverbs 5:18-20

I love how God used a fountain as the metaphor for this verse. A fountain is always beautiful and never overflows, but continually flows in a secured space. There are continual blessings and continuous joy and excitement found only within a marriage where their hearts and minds are only devoted to each other. This is why it's important to guard our hearts and minds against adultery.

One man told me he refuses to go to lunch alone or ride in a car alone with any female co-workers. He also tells his co-workers not to email him pictures of other women when they pass them around the office. He knows this is where it starts. He knows he has to guard his mind against what others may think harmless, because that is how Satan gets his foot in the door.

It's when we allow him to inch his way in a little here and a little there that he gains a stronghold on us. Then, when we get into a dangerous situation we wonder how we ever got into that mess.

...Who cut in on you and kept you from obeying the truth? That kind of persuasion does not come from the one who calls you. 'A little yeast works through the whole batch of dough.'

—Galatians 5:7-9

If you've already fallen victim to a stronghold and fallen into sin, you are

never too far from God's healing hand. Just turn to Him and turn away from the sin and ask God to set you free.

Psalms 119:45 says, "I will walk about in freedom, for I have sought out your precepts." In the Bible look up and study every verse that has to do with adultery, lust, and holiness. Write them down, study them, and speak them out loud daily.

It's also important to stand against the tempting thoughts Satan will use as bait. Stand up against him at the start and meditate on God's Word. When a tempting thought comes into your head, purposely change your thought to what God says. The Bible tells us to flee from thinking about it, but it doesn't say not to have the thought.

Having the thought is not a sin. What you do with the thought will determine whether you remain in God's will or fall to Satan's temptation.

For years, I didn't know I could control my thoughts by not thinking on whatever popped into my head. I didn't know Satan could feed us thoughts. But I've learned that we don't have to allow those thoughts to take root in us. We can stand against him by demolishing those wrong thoughts with the Word of God.

For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.

—2 Corinthians 10:3-5

As we continue to stand against tempting thoughts, eventually they will no longer be a threat. And as Satan sees he has no hold on us, and no authority over us, he will flee. James 4:7 explains, "Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you." Submit your mind to God and trust in His strength because you can't do it without His help.

We're not perfect. God will always make a way out when we fall. There may be consequences for what we've done, but God is able to work them out for our good if we turn to Him.

Psalms 103:10 says that God does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. Verse 14 says that God knows how we were formed. He remembers we are dust. This means God knows we are going to make

mistakes.

God can take the consequences that come from the wrong choices we make and use those to teach us. When we allow God to teach us through our consequences, we learn and grow from our mistakes. God uses the consequences to open our eyes and lead us to where we need to be. Like I said earlier, in my marriage, God used my consequences to open my eyes to see I was searching in the wrong direction. It was not where I wanted to go.

I praise God He was imploring me to turn to Him instead of abandoning me in my mess. I know I deserved more consequences than I received. I praise God I didn't turn away from His warnings because I know I would be in a heap of a mess today. Instead, I am set free from sin and have a transformed life and family.

It's always best for us to listen to God in the first place, but there's always forgiveness and restoration for the heart that turns away from sin and turns toward God.

Some became fools through their rebellious ways and suffered affliction because of their iniquities. They loathed all food and drew near the gates of death. Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble, and he saved them from their distress. He sent forth his word and healed them; he rescued them from the grave. Let them give thanks to the LORD for his unfailing love and his wonderful deeds for men.

—Psalm 107:17-21

God's plan is for you, your family, and all those who are affected by adultery, to be healed from it. Don't let Satan condemn you for what you have done. Remind him, and yourself, that you have been forgiven and God is healing your family. Satan loves to lead us to sin and then condemn us once we fall into it. But we don't have to accept his condemnation.

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

—Romans 8:1

Forgiving Adultery

I believe one lie Satan tells couples is that God says to divorce over adultery. Jesus said in Matthew 19:9, “I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, and marries another woman commits adultery.” I was like many who misinterpreted this verse. I thought Jesus was telling us it was okay to divorce over adultery.

However, in 1 Corinthians 7:10-12, Paul teaches, “To the married I give this command (not I, but the Lord): A wife must not separate from her husband. But if she does, she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband. And a husband must not divorce his wife.”

He doesn’t say ‘*except for adultery.*’ God showed me Jesus wasn’t encouraging divorce over adultery. He was telling us that the spouse who was cheated on wouldn’t be *guilty* of adultery if they got a divorce. He says this because the other spouse has already committed adultery. So adultery has already taken place between the couple.

Adultery is not just the act of an extramarital affair. Adultery is breaking a covenant vow, breaking union (oneness) with our spouses. First Corinthians 6:16 explains, “Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body? For it is said, ‘The two will become one flesh.’”

We break our union with our spouses when we unite our hearts with someone else’s. This is why lust is considered adultery, because it comes from the heart as Matthew 15:19 explains, “For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander.”

This is also why God calls those who turn away from Him adulterers, because they turn their hearts away from Him. James 4:4 says, “You [are like] unfaithful wives [having illicit love affairs with the world and breaking your marriage vow to God]” (AMP)!

God grieves for us when we commit adultery because we break our union with Him. In Ezekiel 6:9, God said, “...how I have been grieved by their adulterous hearts, which have turned away from me, and by their eyes, which have lusted after their idols....” Yet God doesn’t give up on us. He calls us back into union with Him as Jeremiah 3:14 explains, “Return, faithless people,” declares the LORD, “for I am your husband....”

God can do the same for any couples who have turned their hearts away

from each other. He calls their hearts back to Him, and then brings their hearts back to each other.

One man wrote why he decided to stay with his wife after she committed adultery, “I had every right to walk away, but it wasn’t worth what could be for our family. I couldn’t let the enemy take my family from me based on the indiscretion of my wife. I knew I needed to forgive her.” This man thought the same as many of us, that it’s our right to divorce if adultery is involved. However, he knew the enemy would gain so much more had he given up and walked away.

God didn’t tell us to get a divorce over adultery. He can repair our hearts back to oneness and Satan knows that. Satan tries to deceive us by telling us to walk away because he knows whatever God tells us is for our benefit. We need to stand against Satan by listening only to God.

Focusing on the Good

We have to guard our thoughts against anything that is harmful to us and our families. Adultery is not Satan's only target for deception. In my marriage I can always think of something my husband doesn't do the way I would like. There are things I would like to change about him as well, but I can't. Only God can.

This is normal in marriages. Every human being is different. We all think and act differently, so we are going to find something we don't like or agree with in others. Where we fall into deception is when we start focusing on each other's weaknesses. No one likes to be around someone who persists in dwelling on our faults and complaining about our weaknesses.

The Bible says in Galatians 5:15, "If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other." And Proverbs 19:13 says that a quarrelsome wife is like a constant dripping. How annoying is that? Do we think we can nag at our spouses and expect them to enjoy being around us? We only push our spouses away when we constantly complain about their weaknesses. Instead, we should focus on their strengths, and pray and trust God to work on their weaknesses.

For example, my husband stopped being romantic the moment we got married. When we were dating, he used to surprise me all the time with creative gifts and outings. For years it drove me crazy that he would run out on the day of my birthday to buy me something, or shop on Christmas Eve, even though for months I would toss him hints about gifts I wanted. Because he always waited until the last minute, most of the time his gifts weren't what I asked for or needed, but it was all he could find on such short notice.

God showed me that my husband did love me and care about me. It just wasn't the way I expected him to show it. I started thinking about all the things he did do for me to show his love. By choosing to focus on the positive, I can now laugh when my birthday or Christmas comes around and I open the gifts he got me at the last minute. He laughs too and says, "I don't know why I wait so long. I always plan to go earlier. I'll do better next time." If he never gets better, I'll be content because I know he still loves me.

I think a lot of couples fall away from each other over such little issues. They focus on the few things they don't like in each other instead of the many things they do enjoy about each other. It didn't do me any good to cry all those

years and feel sorry for myself and get mad at my husband, because he still did the same thing the next time around. It didn't change. It only caused tension and fighting between us and most likely interfered with any change that might have taken place during those years.

Praying for Our Spouses

By focusing on the positive doesn't mean we have to blind ourselves to wrongs. If your spouse is doing things that are not pleasing to you, you need to pray for them. First Samuel 12:23 says, "...far be it from me that I should sin against the LORD by failing to pray for you...." The King James Version says, "in ceasing to pray for you."

I believe this means when we see something wrong in someone it's our obligation to pray for them instead of judging them and handling it our own way. This doesn't mean we shouldn't confront our spouses when we find something displeasing in them. But we need to pray for them first. Then, we can allow God to lead us to confront them in a loving, non-judgmental way. I believe it's a sin when we blatantly refuse to pray for someone because we are angry at them.

Many who answered my survey, who have good marriages, said they are always in prayer for their spouses and themselves. One woman wrote how she contributes to the success of her marriage. She said, "Prayer—plain and simple. There have been many times when trouble comes between us and through anger I tell myself that I am done...deserve better...and I am out of here. Then I cover everything in prayer and God shows me the error of my ways and the light at the end of my tunnel."

Prayer is a powerful weapon against Satan. There's no room for his deception when you are in a close relationship with God and continually in communion with Him. First Thessalonians 5:17 in the King James Bible says to pray without ceasing, which means to be persistent with our prayers. We don't pray without ceasing to twist God's arm so He will give us what we ask for. Jesus told us God already knows what we need before we ask Him (Matthew 6:8).

We need to pray without ceasing so we don't allow Satan to steal, through doubt and unbelief, what God already promised to provide. Therefore, we should praise God unceasingly as we wait to see our prayers answered. We are fighting against Satan when we are persistent with our prayers.

God has taught me to come to Him first, always and in everything. I am amazed when I do seek God first, He never fails me. He comes through every time. I have found His way is infinitely more effective than all those years of handling my marriage my way.

CONTEND, O Lord, with those who contend with me; fight against those who fight against me! Take hold of shield and buckler, and stand up for my help!

—Psalm 35:1-2, AMP

God is your help and He will contend with your spouse if you are being wronged. As you focus on the good in your spouse, and seek God to work on the wrong, He will show you what you need to do.

Confronting Our Spouses

Many times our spouses don't know what's bothering us as one man expressed, "Honestly, if there's something wrong, tell me, I'll fix it. There's nothing worse than problems festering and not being given an opportunity to do something about it." One woman also advised, "Tell your spouse everything you are feeling, no matter what. You can't expect to fix something that the other doesn't know is broken. Sometimes we don't see the trouble right in front of our eyes."

So confrontation is necessary and works if we approach it in the right way. For example, I did it the wrong way when I used to confront my husband harshly. It only pulled us further apart and instantly put up a wall of defense. My husband said it caused him to respond to me instead of responding to the Holy Spirit's conviction.

We can't take God's place. We only make a mess when we try to do what only God can do. Now instead, I pray first and then wait for God to lead me to confront my husband. Or many times God has me wait on Him to deal with my husband. My husband said now because I'm not always nagging him, he can deal with the conviction he feels, without me in the way redirecting his focus.

Sometimes we have to let go and let God do His work. I have enough wrong with me. I don't need to waste time focusing on my husband's faults. When I focus on his faults I only blind myself to my faults.

How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.

—Matthew 7:4-5

Imagine a huge plank of wood lodged in your eye. Do you think you could see anything, let alone a speck in someone else's eye? We need to examine ourselves first and work with God in the areas He shows are displeasing in us. Then, we can clearly see what isn't right in our spouses and pray accordingly. We can then wait on God to change them, and lead us if we are to confront them

or help them. This will help us keep from pushing our spouses away by nagging them about their faults.

Satan uses these irritants to create strongholds in our marriages. I have seen it happen in my marriage and others. God can help us tear down any strongholds we have allowed in our marriages if we turn to Him. But it's best if we are aware of where they start, so we can be on guard and not allow them in the first place. Satan likes us to be ignorant because he wants us to blindly open the door for him. However, when we are informed we can keep watch and stay alert.

Be Joyful Always

One of the best weapons we can use against Satan is a joyful spirit. This doesn't mean we walk around smiling all day. Joy is a choice we make. It is a frame of mind that prevents anyone or anything from upsetting us. If we have the joy of the Lord in us, no matter what happens—no matter what others do or don't do, we can maintain our joyful spirit.

Nehemiah 8:10 says the joy of the Lord is our strength. Without joy, we hinder the strength that enables us to stand against Satan's attacks. We easily fall into temptations when we are depressed and upset.

I used to struggle with keeping my joy. On one hand I based my joy on how others treated me. On the other hand I took responsibility for trying to make others happy. God first taught me not to depend on other people to make me happy. He set me free from this a few years ago. Then it seemed as if someone was disappointing me in some way almost daily. I was feeling as if I couldn't count on anyone. I lost my joy as I wallowed in self-pity over what people did or didn't do.

God started teaching me to put all my trust in Him and not expect anyone else to make me happy. I chose to learn from that to watch how I treated others, because I knew how it felt when people disappointed me. You can learn so much from your hurts if you will look for the good God wants to teach you through them. Don't base your joy on what people do or don't do. Base your joy on God and what He can do for you, because He will never let you down.

God also taught me I'm not responsible for other people's joy. You are not responsible for the happiness of your spouse or anyone else. You can of course help them, and not hinder them, by loving them and meeting their needs in a balanced way. But ultimately they have to choose to be happy and receive Jesus' joy for themselves.

I can do all the right things for someone and yet they can still choose to be miserable. That is when I need to remind myself they have to make that choice. I need to give them over to God by praying for them, and at the same time, not allow their unhappiness to affect my joy.

We need to be careful we don't waste time trying to make someone happy who doesn't want to be happy. Sometimes when we do too much for someone we hurt them instead of help them. We can also hurt ourselves by compromising

our values to try and please others. Never go against God's Word or His plan to please someone, including your spouse.

I once knew a girl whose husband threatened to leave her unless she agreed to an act that would hurt her and her marriage even more. I told her to stand firm against it, and if he chose to leave it would be his choice.

Stand firm against anything your spouse wants you to do, or continues to do to you, that is wrong. Don't compromise, because you'll only open the door to more destruction in your marriage. By standing firm and giving your spouse to God, you are keeping Satan from gaining more ground and creating more problems.

Don't Lose Hope

As you give your problems over to God, He can turn your spouse's heart around and transform your marriage. Put your trust in God alone. Keep your mind set on the fact He is in control and He is faithful to bring His plan for your family to full completion. Don't ever give up hope.

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

—Romans 15:13

It is by God's power, not our own, that we have hope. The more joyful we are, the more hopeful we'll be. Proverbs 15:15 explains, "All the days of the desponding and afflicted are made evil [by anxious thoughts and forebodings], but he who has a glad heart has a continual feast [regardless of circumstances]" (AMP).

I heard a Bible teacher once say that hopelessness means we have believed the enemy's report over God's. When you are full of hope, you will see a way out of your problems and see solutions coming to pass. Without hope, you will never see the way out.

Satan wants you to believe you have nothing to hope for. If you do have hope, he wants you to believe what you are hoping for will never come to pass.

Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a longing fulfilled is a tree of life.

—Proverbs 13:12

When I finally receive a blessing God has for me because I hope and trust in Him, it's the most fulfilling experience. Nothing compares to that amazing feeling of awe and amazement at a desire God fulfills. I often try to remember those times when I am losing hope. It's just what I need to keep pressing on and persevering in Him.

During hardship, Paul and Timothy were confident God had delivered them before and would do it again. Their hope was not in their own ability, but in God's.

Paul explained:

We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about the hardships we suffered in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life. Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead. He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and He will deliver us. On Him we have set our hope that He will continue to deliver us....

—2 Corinthians 1:8-10

If God raised Jesus Christ from the dead and saved us from our sins, He can save your marriage. Change your thinking to what God can do instead of what you can't do. You can't be hopeful when you are thinking thoughts contrary to what you are hoping for. Remember, our minds direct our actions.

Colossians 3:2 instructs us to set our minds on things above, not on earthly things. When I catch myself thinking a wrong thought, I try to immediately think the opposite to that thought. For example, if I get offended by someone and can't stop thinking about it, I can switch that thought to what God says, which is not to be easily offended, believe the best, and forgive others. If I can't find anything good in someone, I can think: God created them and loves them the same as He created me and loves me.

If I'm drowning in self-pity, I can switch my thinking to line up with what God says about me. I'm a daughter of the King. Everything He has is mine. I am blessed. I am loved. God is busy working all things together for my good.

I have learned I will never receive victory if I continue in wrong thinking. I will never be able to enjoy life if my thoughts are not lined up with what God says about me, my family, and others.

Satan works hard to feed us wrong thoughts. He wants to keep us focused on the wrong things, so we'll never open our minds to the right things. Therefore, we never receive what God's promised and never truly enjoy our lives.

We have the power to enjoy our lives in even the worst circumstances. We can look beyond what we see going on in the natural world and look to how God can supernaturally turn things around in our favor.

...Who hopes for what he already has? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.

—Romans 8:24-25

Don't let your thoughts steal your joy and hope, because you have so much to be hopeful for when you give God control over your life.

Communication

Lack of communication is another door we open to Satan's attacks on our marriages. Many successful families I surveyed attributed their success in their marriages to good communication. And many families that faced separation or divorce said it was due to lack of communication.

One woman wrote me with her testimony about her marriage being restored. Her marriage suffered from a lack of communication. She said she felt her husband didn't respect her; so she didn't respect him. An assumption can turn into something big if you don't communicate your feelings. An assumption could very well be wrong. Don't just assume. Talk about it, find out the truth, and get to the root.

Communication is important in a marriage. We can't have a healthy marriage without it. We should make a priority each day to spend time talking with our spouses. My husband and I love to talk to each other. There are many nights where we stay up late and talk. We don't get a chance to go on a lot of dates, but we always find time each day to talk and spend time together, which I believe matters more because it's a daily effort instead of once or twice a month.

I think when couples get married and have kids they get so focused on the kids, working, and other things that they lose sight of what drew them together in the first place. I like what one woman said, "When one parent places the needs of their children above the needs of their spouse, things tend to crumble." Another woman wrote that her marriage is a success because she takes the time to be a wife in addition to being a mother.

Having four children ages one to ten, and home schooling, it's hard to make time each day for my husband. I have to intentionally make it a priority. When my kids grow up, they will move out and get married and then I have to spend the rest of my life alone with my husband. I want to make sure I don't lose the love and enjoyment that drew us together when we were first dating.

There seems to be nothing worse than spending the rest of your life with someone you don't love and enjoy. I knew a couple who were like that. They were married for over forty years but no one saw them as a happy, loving couple. They showed no love toward each other. They were constantly mean to each other. They were married but that was it; nothing more to show they were in love. I think how sad it would be to live the rest of my life without enjoying my

husband.

One man said to have a happy marriage he chose to raise his children differently than his parents raised him. He said his parents have never appeared happy even though they have been married for over fifty years. Another man said he chose to save his marriage by deciding he didn't want to simply 'co-exist' with his wife once their children were grown.

We need to make it a priority to communicate with each other, spend time together, and keep that bond of love and enjoyment strong in our marriages. It's not going to just happen. We have to purposely make it a priority.

God's Given You the Best

Another way we can sever the bond in our marriages is by comparing our spouses to others. The "grass is greener on the other side" seems to be a common thought pattern to many married couples today. I once heard a famous couple announce they were getting a divorce, and a reporter commented that some people just aren't meant to be together forever. That is a lie many couples believe today.

The man said, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman,' for she was taken out of man." For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.

—Genesis 2:23-24

After Jesus quoted this verse in Matthew 19:5, He went on to say in verse six: "So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate."

I don't know how we can take this verse any other way. God places a high value on marriage and so should we. God said in Malachi 2:16 that He hates divorce. I recently heard a preacher say God hates it because of what it does to the family.

The Bible relates marriage to Christ and the church. When we accept Christ into our hearts, we are one with Him and He never leaves us or gives up on us. If we enjoyed our spouses when we were dating and first got married, and then as the years went by we stopped enjoying them, what makes us think that won't happen again with someone else? It all looks good and appealing at first, but like

Proverbs 14:12 says, “There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death.”

Satan likes to cause problems in marriages and then feed couples the thought that there’s someone better out there. It’s a lie that too many couples fall for. For instance, social networking is popular today. Finding long lost friends and relatives and staying connected is great. However, as with everything, we need to be on guard. Men and women find their old romances and recall past relationships by bringing back those old memories. By doing that, it flings the door open to temptations.

I have heard of men and women leaving their spouses for old flames after they reconnected with them on the Internet. I have heard of married women putting up alluring pictures of themselves and getting tempted by all the attention they receive. It is alluring, but false. And you can be sure Satan is behind it just baiting more people into his trap.

No matter how hard my marriage was at times, and no matter how close I came to temptations, I always knew in the back of my mind there was no one better out there for me. If God has given me my husband, I can be sure He has given me the best there is for me. Instead of focusing on everything my husband is not, I can focus on everything he is.

I think when couples get married they expect that newlywed feeling and excitement to continue. Marriage takes a lot of work. It’s like your house, if you neglect it and never work to keep it up, the mess will pile higher. But if you work daily to keep it up, you will enjoy a beautiful, clean house.

When I first met my husband I fell crazy in love with him. I remember thinking he was perfect and had no flaws. I thought we were alike and perfect for each other, which we are, but not in the way I thought when we first met. Shortly after getting married, the love goggles came off and I soon learned we were vastly different. My husband couldn’t be more opposite from me, but something drew me to him enough to marry him in the first place.

Because we are so different, that doesn’t mean I need to go and find someone more like me. That wouldn’t be what I need. I can now see our differences as a blessing, because where I am weak, he is strong. Where he is weak, I am strong. We balance each other. We are one flesh. What I lack, he has. What he lacks, I have. The more God works in each of us, the more we see we fit together as one.

I challenge you to start viewing your spouse this way. Your spouse completes you and together you are one. As God works in both of you, you will

start to see how you fit together. We tend to only see what is in front of us right now. We often don't look ahead to see the big picture God has drawn out for our families. We need to look beyond our problems and see our marriages as God sees them, restored and whole.

I may not have a perfect marriage now and I am definitely not perfect, nor is my husband, but I look ahead to what God can change us to be. I see my husband as who I know God wants him to be, even if he's not there yet.

You will never find someone who is "perfect" for you. Perfection is only found in and through Jesus. As we allow Him to, God takes the imperfections in our marriages and works them out of us. It's amazing seeing how God is changing and perfecting us. I am amazed at watching Him change things I never thought could change. I can't wait to see how we are five, ten, and even twenty years from now. I know we will only be growing closer together as we trust God to work in us.

Trust that no matter how bad your marriage is, God can and will change you and your spouse if you will trust and allow Him to. Change your thoughts to what God can do. When your thoughts and actions are in agreement with God, nothing is impossible.

Satan wants you to focus on what's in front of you so you don't look beyond to what he knows God has planned for your family. He knows if he can keep you where you are, he can keep you away from God's plan and gradually work to destroy your family.

Malachi reveals God's ultimate plan for our marriages:

Has not the LORD made them one? In flesh and spirit they are his.
And why one? Because he was seeking godly offspring. So guard
yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith with the wife of your
youth.

—Malachi 2:15

Satan works hard to try to destroy our marriages because he knows God's plan for us is to raise up godly children. He knows the power in two hearts, surrendered to God's will, and the positive impact their generations will have. God's plan is to take us from where we are in our marriages and bring us together as one. Satan's plan is to convince us there is someone better out there.

Some spouses think they need to find someone better because they married someone they were warned not to. God warns us not to be unequally yoked

before we get married, and He warns us in many other ways for our own good. He gives us these warnings because He knows ahead of time the heartache and problems we will face.

However, it doesn't say anywhere in the Bible that we should get a divorce when we realize we made a mistake and married someone who wasn't God's first choice for us.

David in the Bible is a perfect example. He married Bathsheba after he committed adultery with her and had her husband killed. Do you think it was God's will for David to have another man's wife?

Second Samuel 11:27 says, "...David had her brought to his house, and she became his wife and bore him a son. But the thing David had done displeased the LORD."

However, David acknowledged what he did was wrong and repented. And God used their second son, Solomon, to be the direct line to Jesus. I believe God purposely did that to show us that He sees light in every darkness. God can bring light out of every wrong thing we have done. He can take any wrong and turn it around for our good if we turn to Him.

If I say, "Surely the darkness will hide me and the light become night around me," even the darkness will not be dark to you; the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to you.

—Psalm 139:11-12

I have witnessed many divorces due to a spouse thinking there's someone better out there. I have never seen one turn out for the better. I have witnessed the pain of a wife leaving her husband to later watch another woman move into her home, marry her husband, and raise her children. The heartache of seeing her deep regrets of never being able to turn back time and have her family back is heartbreaking.

I believe this is one reason why God commands us not to get a divorce, and if we do, not to remarry someone else (1 Corinthians 7:10-11). I believe God says this because His plan is to restore the broken marriage. He doesn't want us to create another family and prevent the original family from being restored to wholeness.

I don't say this to condemn you if you are remarried. God works with us in whatever situation we are in. He calls us where we are right now. His commands are always His first choice for us.

Don't Give Up

When we are tempted to give up, we should think about all the problems divorce will create. We should also think of the effect it will have on our children. Those who were surveyed, who had faced divorce or separation, all shared the same thing about how it affected their children. It had a negative affect and hurt them immensely. It also caused some of the children to act out and not want to be around either parent. Many also wrote because of all the yelling between the parents, the kids started mimicking their behaviors.

Divorce scares children. It takes away their security. Children need to feel secure. Their security lies in being with their parents. One woman who was facing divorce and is on the road to restoration explained, "Kids get their little hearts broken when there is fighting or unresolved conflict in a marriage. They want to see Mom and Dad as a team so they can feel secure. This is a huge reason why I have chosen not to get a divorce."

This woman went on to share how the restoration is now impacting her children. She explained, "They feel safer and more secure in themselves. God has not finished, we just got started with the restoration of our marriage. God is doing it by softening each of our hearts. I really don't think I could do this without God changing my heart."

If we could just look ahead and see the bigger mess divorce creates, we would see how much added pain could be avoided by turning to God and waiting on Him to do His work.

Take the High Road - Commitment

Lack of commitment is prevalent today. People give up too quickly. Many couples choose to live together instead of marrying because they want that easy way out if things get tough. Had I lived with my husband before we got married, we would have easily split up after the first year.

All relationships get tough at one time or another. Through the tough times, when two people stay committed in their marriage, they come out stronger. Second Chronicles 15:7 and Galatians 6:9 say we will be rewarded if we don't give up. Not giving up takes commitment.

One woman said the success of her marriage for twenty-five years is due to commitment. She said no matter what, they stay together and work it out. Another stated she always had her mind set she would never abandon her children or her husband. She had plenty of reason to leave her husband, but she

pressed through, and many years later her pressing through was well worth it. She now enjoys a restored marriage.

Her children have also pressed through hard times with their spouses and all have good marriages. Our children learn by example. If we are quick to give up in the midst of trials, they are likely to grow up doing the same.

Proverbs 2:16-17 shares how wisdom can save you from the adulteress who has left the partner of her youth and ignored the covenant she made before God. In the Bible, whenever God made a covenant, it was set. He doesn't take back His Word and give up on us, and we shouldn't either.

I thank God my husband didn't give up on me, because through those tough years God was working on me. Though it took awhile, and it appeared I'd never change, and at times I made him completely miserable, my husband refused to give up on me. Like the woman who earlier wrote about God changing her heart as well as her husband's, God was also dealing with my husband's heart during those years. He was working things out of him as well.

One woman whose marriage was restored wrote, "You are part of the problem. Leaving doesn't usually fix things; it carries over until you deal with you." Allow God to work in you first and wait patiently as He works in your spouse. He is faithful to work in both you and your spouse.

I have encouraged others not to give up on their spouses because I know God can change them. I have told them to keep praying for their spouses because I know what it's like to be the one who is lost. It may take longer than you want, but the more you stay focused on God and allow Him to work in your heart, the faster He can work on your behalf in your spouse's heart.

Receive His grace, His strength, which He's provided to get you through these hard times with a good attitude. First Corinthians 7:24 says, "Each man, as responsible to God, should remain in the situation God called him to." If God called you where you are now, He will give you His strength to stay there and wait for Him to work.

Keep thinking positive. Positive thinking brings positive results. Staying negative and defeated will only bring negative and defeated results. My husband held on and believed he was supposed to stay with me, even though he had no idea if I would ever change. Had he given up on me, I don't know what kind of a mess I would be in today. I can tell you I wouldn't have written this book, that's for sure.

God has a great plan for your spouse too. Don't give up. Give your spouse a chance like my husband gave me. Be obedient to whatever God is telling you.

God hasn't given up on you and He won't give up on your spouse.

We wait in hope for the Lord; he is our help and our shield. In him
our hearts rejoice, for we trust in his holy name.

—Psalm 33:20-21

Our Attitudes

I strongly believe our attitudes in every trial we face determine how long we stay in our trials. For example, my husband was called for jury duty during one of his busiest times at work. He spent a whole day at the courthouse waiting to be called or dismissed, and his number was one of the last to be called. He was then put on a case and was told it would last three days. He became upset because he needed to work and had already lost a whole day. He allowed it to upset him that evening and into the next day.

The next morning, as he was on his way to the courthouse, he told himself he needed to change his attitude and stay positive. He said it lifted his spirit and he enjoyed being at the courthouse. And surprisingly, the case was resolved that day, two days earlier than expected.

A lady at the courthouse said she was surprised it ended so quickly. She said normally that type of case never goes that smoothly. My husband told me he felt God blessed him and shortened his stay there because he turned his attitude around. He decided to be positive and trust God instead of murmuring and complaining.

Complaining only slows our growth. It doesn't resolve our problems. It just keeps us focused on our problems, as we see with the Israelites in the Old Testament. They wandered around the wilderness for forty years, even though it was only a ten day journey through it, all the while complaining and not revering and trusting God. Jesus, however, was only in the wilderness for forty days and He didn't once complain (Mark 1:13).

Do everything without complaining or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe.

—Philippians 2:14-15

If your spouse is the one who is complaining and arguing, the best way you can help is by being gentle and kind in response. Proverbs 15:1 says, "A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger."

In my years of being a server, I frequently came across harsh and rude customers. For many years, I would instinctively respond the same in return, which only fueled their anger and mine, and never ended well. Once I started walking with God, He began convicting me to be polite and friendly to everyone, no matter what. This wasn't easy to do at first, but the more I did it, the more amazed I was at how God gave me the power to change the situation.

When someone was rude and hard to please, I would smile more and give them the best service, regardless. By the end of the meal, when they realized they couldn't upset me and I provided them with good service, their attitude changed. Their attitude calmed down because I gave them nothing to fuel it. Experiencing positive results made me determined not to give fuel to someone else's anger. The more I did this, the more I realized I needed to do this outside of work as well.

I was talking to a woman recently. She said she and her husband were frustrated over a few things one day. She noticed one of them would complain and that would cause the other to complain. After going back and forth, she finally just started laughing. She said when she laughed their arguments stopped and their attitudes changed.

Try this next time your spouse or anyone else is rude to you. See how your kind response calms them. And if it doesn't, at least you will remain calm. We can't let Satan use us to fuel someone else's fire. Instead, we need to extinguish it and stop it from spreading any further.

Keeping Our Peace

One area God has been working with my husband and me is not allowing our children and daily life circumstances to frustrate us. A lot of our fights start when we take our frustrations out on each other. Our kids wear us out and Satan loves to attack us when we're tired and at our weakest, physically and spiritually.

I had an incident when I first started writing this book. I had just had my baby and was sleep deprived. On a particular day I'd been feeling overwhelmed with my newborn screaming as I was trying to get dinner on the table and my kids to sit down to eat. My husband paged me through our phone to tell me something from the upstairs. Each time I answered it, it wouldn't work. By the fourth time, I got frustrated and threw the phone up the stairs and broke it. My husband then got angry at me because I broke the phone. We argued and he left to go to his hockey game that evening without saying anything to me, which angered me more.

Satan then attacked me with his self-condemnation routine because I slipped. He prodded me about responding like that while writing this book. But God reminded me I will never be perfect in this life as long as I'm in this body. I can choose to feel guilty or I can rely on God to keep me from falling next time that happens.

To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you
before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy.

—Jude 1:24

Even though we both slipped that time, we have come a long way, because after my husband left I went right to the Bible and looked up the first verse I saw on anger. It was Proverbs 19:11 and it spoke so clearly to me. It read, "Good sense makes a man restrain his anger, and it is his glory to overlook a transgression or an offense" (AMP).

This showed me it was for my own good to restrain myself from acting out in anger. It was also for my own good to overlook the offense and forgive my husband, and more importantly, forgive myself. By reading that, I knew I needed to drop it. Once I did, it felt like a weight lifted off me, the heaviness went away,

and my joy instantly returned.

Also, while my husband was at hockey his nephew invited him over to watch football. My husband told him he would come because we were fighting anyway. He realized he forgot his cell phone, and told his nephew he wanted to stop at home so I wouldn't worry about him. When he came home he apologized to me. He said in the past, he would've just gone to his nephew's and let me worry about him.

We used to live in strife almost daily, but thanks to God these fights are few and far between now. If your marriage is full of strife, and you don't stop venting your frustrations on each other, you're allowing Satan to steal your joy and peace and it will affect your family.

God wants to help you. Don't think for a moment you can do it on your own. I could have in no way dropped it just like that with my own strength, neither could my husband. This was proof of God working in us. Since that incident, God has helped us see that we need to set a good example for our children and get along with each other, especially when we're under pressure. We now try to help encourage one another whenever one of us gets frustrated.

We need to teach our children we can remain calm when we're under pressure, and display self-control so they can learn to do the same. Jesus set a perfect example of how we can remain calm during a storm:

Without warning, a furious storm came up on the lake, so that the waves swept over the boat. But Jesus was sleeping.

—Matthew 8:24

I love how this verse says "*without warning.*" We find out what's inside us when we are caught off guard. That's when Satan loves to make his move. He waits for just the right time. He did that with Jesus (Matthew 4:1-11). After he tempted Jesus, and saw Jesus couldn't be moved, he left to wait for an opportune time. And he does the same with us.

We need to face our daily battles with a good attitude. Many times when I am overwhelmed, or notice my husband is, I will run into his arms and lighten up the mood by joking around. Stopping for a rest in the middle of a storm, like Jesus did, helps us calm down when we are overwhelmed.

In the past, I felt I had no control over how I felt. When situations arose that pushed me to explode, I felt I had no choice but to give in to my flesh. By relying on God daily, and making an effort to change, He gradually changed me.

It didn't happen overnight, but I slowly started seeing myself improve in this area.

As I rely on God's strength, I can now extinguish the spark that could ignite my anger and cause me to lash out. But when I try to handle my days on my own, without leaning on God and looking to Him for help, I get easily frustrated.

God gives us the strength to laugh and find enjoyment in the not-so-enjoyable moments. Not taking everything so seriously and enjoying even the hectic, overwhelming moments shows the devil he has no hold on us.

I refuse to let Satan steal my blessing from God to enjoy my family, and you need to as well. Satan is already stealing from too many families. We can't allow him to steal from ours. I can't tell you how many frustrated, crabby, and unhappy parents I waited on through my years of being a server. Just pay attention next time you're in public and see how much frustration and anger you notice in parents.

I am not exempt from it either. I became frustrated every time I felt overwhelmed by my children. Through those times, God has taught me several things. First, to have compassion when I see parents frustrated with their children. I need to pray for them or give them a word of encouragement instead of making them feel worse by judging them. Second, I've learned not to allow myself to become frustrated at home. The more I practice this at home, the more control I have in public.

Additionally, I need to stop and ask God to help me whenever I feel frustration building up. Many times just a quick, "Help me Lord" is all I need. Also, if I do lose my temper, I need to apologize to whomever I acted in frustration to.

And last, God has taught me not to be overly concerned with what other people think. There are people who will be annoyed with you just because you have children. I had an incident like this in the grocery store one day. I was with all four of my children when this woman started coming down the aisle. When she saw all my children, she gave me an annoyed look and huffed, turned around and left the aisle. Some people just don't tolerate children. We can't let their frustrations frustrate us.

I believe many people get frustrated because they don't know how to control their emotions. They don't know Jesus can give them peace and power to remain calm in every situation.

I was talking to a woman once while I was pregnant with my fourth child. She said she couldn't believe how calm I was. My kid's weren't even acting up

so I was surprised she would say that since there was nothing going on to cause me to be frustrated. That wasn't the only time I had someone tell me that. It shows people notice something different in me, a peace that stands out.

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

—John 14:27

Jesus' peace is different from anything this world has to offer. That is why it stands out. It is not my doing. I can in no way boast. People are seeing Jesus' peace working in me. The less I hinder it, the stronger it will grow and become more noticeable to others.

We need to allow God to grow the fruit of peace in us by yielding to the Holy Spirit whenever we get in a frustrating situation. The Bible also tells us to seek and pursue peace, and let it rule in our hearts (1 Peter 3:11, Colossians 3:15). I have to study peace in the Bible often. In the past, I have even set a timer several times a day reminding me to stay in peace. I know I need to do whatever it takes to remain in peace if I'm going to enjoy my family.

I don't want to give Satan one ounce of my peace because it holds my joy. Satan knows if he can steal our peace, he can steal our joy. And without joy, we fling open the door for him to come in and steal all the great things God has for us. This is why it is important we remain in peace with our spouses even when they are hard to get along with.

Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord.

—Romans 12:17-19

By trusting God to take care of the wrongs done to me, it helps me remain in peace when a part of me wants to fight back. It also helps me stay in peace by knowing Satan uses other people's weaknesses to attack my weaknesses. If we know Satan is using our spouses to provoke us, it will help us not get offended

when they treat us wrong. We need to remember our struggles are not against people.

In Matthew 16:21, Jesus was explaining to His disciples how He must be handed over and killed and raised to life on the third day. Peter then rebuked Jesus in verse 22 saying, “Never, Lord! This shall never happen to you!”

In the next verse, Jesus replied, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men.”

We notice that Jesus wasn’t speaking directly to Peter. Right before this, Jesus blessed Peter and told him He would give him, and all who receive Jesus, the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven—Jesus’ same authority on earth (Matthew 16:19). So we know Jesus wasn’t mad at Peter. He knew Satan was the one behind it.

If Satan was working through the disciples’ weaknesses, we can be sure he’s working through our weaknesses too. When you begin to understand this, it’ll change the way you look at people. When your spouse or anyone wrongs you, you’ll have the wisdom not to take it personally because you know Satan is trying to get you to fall, just as he tried with Jesus.

Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing,
because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing.
For, “Whoever would love life and see good days must keep his
tongue from evil and his lips from deceitful speech.”

—1 Peter 3:9-10

If we want to enjoy the life Jesus died to give us, we have to stay at peace. As long as we do our part, God will take care of those fighting against us, including our spouses.

When a man’s ways are pleasing to the LORD, he makes even his
enemies live at peace with him.

—Proverbs 16:7

Meddling Relatives

Another way Satan tries to steal the peace in our households is through meddling relatives. Relatives often have a way of choosing sides, which creates dissension in a marriage. One woman said her husband was a “mama’s boy” and she felt her mother-in-law was interfering in their relationship.

I’ve found this to be a common problem in many marriages. In Genesis 2:24 it says a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh. The Amplified version says the husband will cleave to his wife.

If you cleave to your parents rather than your spouse, and tell them all your marriage problems and your spouse’s faults, you are inviting your parents to interfere in your marriage. The same applies to you if you have children who are married. It’s just as important not to interfere in their marriages. Don’t allow yourself to come between them. Set boundaries, and encourage them to communicate and work out their problems together.

We need to confront our parents if they step over those boundaries and cause problems in our marriages. I’ve seen a husband or wife stand with their parents against their spouse. I’ve seen a mother or father verbally attack their son or daughter-in-law and the son or daughter-in-law got no support from their spouse.

We need to stand up for our spouses, even if it means standing up to our own parents. We still need to respect our parents, of course. And I’m not saying we should never tell them anything. We just have to make sure our parents aren’t interfering and causing division in our marriages. And if they are, we need to confront them.

I also believe many couples don’t respect their in-laws, which creates problems in a marriage as well. It is disrespectful to our spouses not to show respect for our in-laws. I know a woman who had a cruel mother-in-law, and despite her harshness, the woman still showed her love and respect. She invited her mother-in-law to her home, visited frequently, gave gifts, and treated the woman the same as her own mother. We should treat our in-laws as our own parents regardless of the way they treat us.

If your spouse is disrespecting your parents or allowing their parents to come between your relationship, tell your spouse how you feel. If they don’t agree and don’t see it, pray and ask God to open their eyes to see it is hurting you and your

marriage. Trust God to work out anything that is causing problems and coming between you and your spouse.

Seek God First

Whatever problem your family is experiencing right now, God wants to help you through it. He is faithful to direct you. Just keep seeking Him for help and don't give up. As you seek God for answers, He will give you the wisdom to know what to do. I believe many times we run away or run to others for help instead of going to God first.

A woman told me she and her husband spent thousands of dollars on counseling, going to numerous counselors about their marriage, just to be told, "You guys should just get a divorce." She was shocked most of the counselors suggested divorce even before hearing her complete situation. It was also sad to say many of these were Christian counselors. I know there are many good Christian counselors out there who have helped many people. However, when we hold someone else's advice over God's, and it is not in line with His Word, that's when we can lead ourselves into Satan's deception and take the wrong path. Had this woman listened to their advice, she would have missed out on the amazing changes God is making in her marriage right now.

After you have gone to God first, He may direct you to counseling, but then you know He has sent you, and you can be sure He will direct you to the proper help. God may even direct you to godly counsel from a close friend who loves you and who you can trust. Or He may direct you to a pastor at your church.

God has also led me to resources such as books and CDs on the subject I am dealing with. He uses many different avenues to help us, but we need to go to Him first and keep making sure what we are learning and doing lines up with the Bible, because God's Word holds the true way through every situation.

Years ago I suffered from depression and anxiety. It was one of the most difficult times in my life. I couldn't seem to get out of it. My husband suggested repeatedly I go to counseling or at least go to the doctor and get something to take the edge off. I refused to do any of that because I was seeking God first and I knew He was leading me through it.

I knew medicine wasn't the answer because I could become dependent on it and wouldn't be fully dependent on God. I also knew we were struggling financially and couldn't afford counseling. I knew if I clung to God and continued in His Word and allowed Him total access in my life, He would bring me out of it.

I'm so thankful God strengthened me during that time not to give up, turn away, and find my own remedy. God was faithful and He brought me through it. The Bible says to seek and you will find (Matthew 7:8). God strengthened me to keep seeking until I found the answer.

I found out I had several strongholds I couldn't break free from on my own, I needed God's help. As I clung to Jesus, and didn't give up, He broke me free. I came out of the depression better off than before I went through it. Had I listened to my husband's advice over what God said, when I knew they were not the same, I wouldn't have come through it the way I did.

It may have seemed harder to go through my problem the way God wanted me to. It's the refining process. The fire hurts when you're going through it, but when you get out you're purely refined and more beautiful than before.

God not only brought me out of the depression, but He gave me freedom from the stronghold, more wisdom, more understanding, and promoted me to step into His will. Right after I was able to quit working and stay home with my children full time, which I had been praying for many years. I honestly don't believe I would have seen those results if I hadn't stayed dependent on God alone.

Nothing can top God's wisdom and plan. His plan for us is better than we could ever come up with on our own. Don't let Satan deceive you into taking your problems into your own hands. He just wants you to miss out on the great plan God has for your family. Seek God's help first and I guarantee you will see positive results.

Cry Out to Him

Sometimes all you need to do is cry out to God. I believe we all go through seasons of weakness. It keeps us humble because it reminds us how powerless we are on our own. Paul said in 2 Corinthians 12:8-10 that he boasts gladly in his weaknesses because Christ's power is made perfect in our weaknesses. When we are weak, we are humble and Jesus can work His power in us.

You can't save your marriage on your own. You can't be a good spouse or parent on your own. You don't have to do it on your own. That's what's so great about Jesus; He can do it through you.

Psalm 34:17 says, "The righteous cry out, and the LORD hears them; he delivers them from all their troubles." And verse 19 says, "A righteous man may have many troubles, but the LORD delivers him from them all."

Notice these verses don't say "some" of our troubles. They say "ALL" of our troubles. I used to read verses like these and think I wasn't righteous because I didn't do everything right. Therefore, they couldn't apply to me. This was indeed a lie, because when we have Christ living in us God sees us as righteous.

If your marriage is at the breaking point, God can work out whatever is causing problems and deliver you out of them. One man whose marriage was restored advised, "Pray that God gives you wisdom to understand how you got there and to show you ways that you can resolve your conflicts and restore your marriage."

One woman also advised, "There is a reason that the thought of divorce or separation has come into your head. And if you don't explore 'why,' then it will never get better."

You have to allow God to get to the root of your problems. Allow Him access to every area of your life. Don't hold anything back. Remember to stay positive and be patient because it most likely won't happen overnight. It's through the hard times that we learn the most, so value these times. They will be worth it in the long run.

Remember don't believe Satan's lies telling you there's no hope for your marriage.

...He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth,

for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies.

—John 8:44

Take a stand against Satan's schemes and don't allow him to get his foot in the door of your family. You have the real power, he doesn't. You have Jesus on your side, the name above all names! I love what one man who's been married for twenty-five years said, "We know that Jesus is for us and the success of our marriage. We are not leaving." Don't give up hope on your marriage, because Jesus won't!

***Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, “Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.”
—Hebrews 13:5***

CHAPTER FOUR

MONEY – MOST COMMON MARITAL PROBLEM

Financial Strife

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oney reportedly is the leading cause of today's divorces. Financial stress can cripple even the best marriages. In my own marriage money causes most of our fights. When I married my husband both of us were in debt. We began our marriage without knowing a thing about budgeting or stewardship.

I am embarrassed to say it has taken us our whole married life to learn this lesson, and we are still learning. Yet God has worked with us to lead us down the right path and we are now seeing positive results. God has worked with us individually, and together, to show us how to live within our means and be better stewards of what He's given us.

Most of our fights start when one of us falls off the plan, by overspending or making a rash purchase. When we first started following God's plan for our finances, my husband charged a large amount on our high balanced credit cards which we were working to pay off. He did tell me before he made those purchases because we agreed to consult each other before making major purchases. After we discussed it, I told him I didn't think it was wise. I didn't think we needed it, and I knew we couldn't afford it. I suggested he pray about it and left it in his hands.

Both times he didn't follow my advice, but I didn't get mad at him. It was hard not to get upset. But I kept praying and giving it over to God, and He enabled me to wait patiently to watch Him work it out. I saw the frustration in my husband as he tried to install the items he bought. One was for his computer and one was for his car. Both times he had a hard time installing the items. I believe he felt convicted, and that frustrated him more.

Later he admitted he was wrong. He gave up an annual outing, one that he never missed, to make up for what he spent on one item. And the other item he asked me to resell. By telling him how I felt, and then leaving it in God's hands, he said he was able to clearly see the mistake he made.

Since those incidents, my husband has been the strong one when it comes to spending. I have been the one to slip here and there, not him. All those years I wasted fighting with him over money only caused more trouble and got us deeper into debt.

When we constantly get mad at our spouses and try to change them, we create a distraction which makes it hard for them, and ourselves, to hear God's direction.

I was assistant coach on my daughter's basketball team one year. It was the first time most of the girls had played basketball. There was nothing more distracting for the girls than their parents yelling instructions from the stands. The coach and I were on the court instructing the girls. When the parents yelled out their instructions, it distracted the girls, and confused and frustrated them.

Now think of God as the coach trying to instruct your spouse on a matter, and then you as the parent yelling out your own idea of how to change them. Do you see how annoying and distracting that would be for your spouse?

We should leave the coaching to the Coach and stick to the cheering and encouraging, and watch God teach them. When we work this way we will see results instead of causing confusion and frustration.

God's Provision

God has worked in our finances above and beyond what I could imagine. Now I am excited to go to Him when money becomes an issue. I anticipate seeing how God works with us.

When we look for God in everything, we will find Him in everything. God will exceed our expectations when all our expectations are in Him. What is money that we have to fight about it? We brought nothing into this world and we will take nothing out of it when we leave. Why waste time when we could be enjoying our families instead of destroying our marriages over money?

God says He will provide for all our needs. In Matthew 6:25-34, Jesus told us not to worry about our life, what we will eat and drink, and what we will wear. He reminded us how God feeds the birds and clothes the grass of the fields to how much more valuable we are, and how much more He will feed and clothe us. He said our Heavenly Father knows we need food and clothing. He told us not to worry about tomorrow, that each day has enough trouble of its own. He said to seek first His kingdom and His righteousness and all these things will be given to us as well.

Jesus was telling us that instead of worrying to shift our focus toward God. To seek after means to strive after with all our hearts. If all our attention is focused on seeking God and His will for our lives, we won't have anything to worry about. When we seek God and get to know Him, we will see that what He

says is true. Our faith will grow and we won't worry because we will see that God is faithful to His promises.

The more we learn about and get to know God, the more we will trust Him. Not just in the area of our finances, but in every area. Faith is not convincing God to give us His promises. Faith is opening our hearts to receive His promises. When we worry, we are not walking in faith. We are not reaching out and taking hold of what is already there for us.

This is why the Bible tells us not to be double-minded. I think this means at one moment we hear the Word and believe what God says. Then, when we don't see it happen right away, we start to doubt and believe it's not going to happen. When we hear the Word again, we get all pumped up with faith again. Then, something else happens and our faith withers.

I used to be extremely double-minded. My husband used to tell me he couldn't believe I could have so much faith one moment, and then lose it when circumstances changed.

If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does.

—James 1:5-8

Once I saw God was faithful and saw His promises being fulfilled, my faith grew. I was then able to stand against doubt whenever we were hit with a trial. When I stand against doubt, I always experience God's best in any situation. God always comes through above and beyond, and many times it's sudden and unexpected.

In the past, when I couldn't find the faith to believe God would provide for us, it helped me by seeing God work in the lives of others. If I saw that God met someone else's needs, it sparked my faith to believe He would meet mine because I knew He didn't show favoritism (Acts 10:34).

When we start trusting God, we will see that He gives us more than we need. We will also learn how to be more efficient with our time and money, so we won't waste the resources He gives us.

The righteous eat to their hearts' content, but the stomach of the wicked goes hungry.

—Proverbs 13:25

Be Content

We can come to God as a child does to his father and trust He will provide for us. We provide for our children's needs. Why wouldn't we believe God provides for us?

How many times do we worry about paying our bills? We worry until the due date. Then we make the payment and realize we worried for nothing. I used to constantly worry about paying our bills, even though we paid them regularly. God has always provided for us.

Even though I saw God providing for us, I still used to lay awake at night wondering how we were going to get out of debt. God doesn't leave us to sink in our messes. He creates a way out. God showed us we needed to follow His plan and do what He told us to do and trust Him to do what we couldn't do. I realized the reason I worried was because I wouldn't focus on today. I kept worrying about tomorrow. God taught me to receive everything I need one day at a time.

We shouldn't waste our lives worrying about what may or may not happen tomorrow. Instead, we need to trust that God provides everything we need every day.

But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that.

—1 Timothy 6:8

I have to remind myself of this verse whenever I am tempted to worry about money. I have to ask myself: "Do we all have food today? Do we all have clothes today? Has God provided everything I need for today?" My answer is consistently "yes." That helps me be content.

In Philippians 4:11, Paul said he learned how to be content in whatever state he was in. He also stated in 1 Timothy 6:6, "But godliness with contentment is great gain." The Amplified Bible defines content as, "*satisfied to the point where I am not disturbed or disquieted.*" God wants us to pursue holiness and be content with what He provides each day. Only then will He entrust us with more.

Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, "Never will I leave you;

never will I forsake you.”

—Hebrews 13:5

The key to being content is to be thankful for what we have. God wants us to have good things, and wants to be good to us beyond our daily needs, but we hinder His blessings when we're not thankful.

First Thessalonians 5:18 says to give thanks in all circumstances. And Ephesians 5:19-20 says, “...Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

God has helped me start thanking Him in every situation, whether good or bad. In the past, I frequently complained to God that we never had enough money, even though we were working as much as we could. God had to show us that He was giving us more than enough. We just needed to look within, with what we had. He also showed me that I stepped out of His plan when I was worrying and stressing out instead of trusting Him.

When we would slip out of God's plan, and our debt grew, God wasn't punishing us. God didn't cause our debt to grow. We caused it by stepping away from His plan. The debt piled higher because I kept straying from His will into condemnation. Instead of beating myself up, I should have returned to His plan.

You don't lose God's blessings and plan for your life when you fail. When you turn from your way and follow Him, He knows how to get you back on the right path. My husband and I didn't get into our mess overnight and we won't get out of it overnight. God has shown us that He has already given us victory. Each step we take with Him brings us closer to it. So now whenever financial trouble comes, I try to remember to ask God to help us walk in His plan. And I pray every step of the way for His direction.

By learning our own way doesn't work, and by seeing that we are walking in the right direction, I can trust God knows what's best for us. I don't need to lay awake at night worrying about tomorrow anymore. Instead, I can just enjoy today.

It is vain for you to rise up early, to take rest late, to eat the bread of [anxious] toil—for He gives [blessings] to His beloved in sleep.

—Psalm 127:2, AMP

This means we don't have to stress and overwork ourselves trying to figure everything out on our own. God wants to provide and give us rest. I used to stress over spending a dollar extra at the grocery store. I would get upset when I forgot to use a coupon. I would travel with all my kids to different stores for sale items, when God wanted to bless me more than those few dollars I was worrying about spending. All He wanted me to do was trust Him.

Going to different stores for sales, using coupons, and working hard are not wrong. Self-imposed stress and worry are. We don't give God the chance to work with us when we try to figure everything out on our own. God's returns are far beyond what we could ever figure out on our own.

If you have doubt, spend time studying Scriptures on God's provisions and blessings. Then, whenever you are tempted to worry, remind yourself of His promises. Remember that all God's promises in the Bible are yours through Jesus.

For no matter how many promises God has made, they are "Yes"
in Christ....

—2 Corinthians 1:20

Teamwork

It took us awhile to see results in our finances. God had to peel away multiple layers before He could work with us in this area. Yet during that time God still provided for us and He will provide for you too.

It also took awhile for God to bring us together as a team. I used to pay our bills for years. My husband continued to ask me to hand them over to him, but I would always refuse. God kept tugging at me to give them to my husband, but I didn't want to give them up. After several years, I finally submitted and handed the responsibility over to him.

I had never been late on a payment before because I was very conscientious about paying bills. When my husband took over, he wanted to use the computer to pay our bills. At first he was accidentally late on a few payments. I would get mad and try to convince him to do it my way, but he wouldn't.

As I prayed to God, telling Him I gave the responsibility to my husband like He wanted me to, I asked Him why it wasn't working. God showed me just because I handed the bills over to my husband, it didn't release me from being involved. They are my bills as well and we are a team. We both need to know everything about our finances.

So now he pays all the bills and I check on them and update them. We regularly discuss them to keep each other informed. I can honestly say we are doing a lot better now that we are coming together as a team.

It is not who physically pays the bills that matters. The lesson God was trying to teach us was that we need to be a team and both be informed about our finances. I am thankful God kept nudging me to hand them over because my husband's way of managing our bills is easier and more accurate. He keeps such good records that we can tell exactly how much we spend in every category every month. And we can see how much we have saved from one year to the next.

By implementing this method, God is showing us how He is lowering our bills. He can also show us where to cut back because everything is categorized and every penny is accounted for. My system was just writing checks without recording anything. I was oblivious to how much we spent on anything.

One man said that he wants his wife to be more involved in their finances so she understands where the money goes each month. It's important for you and

your spouse to be informed in every area of your finances. When you are both informed you can work together to stay within your budget.

Giving

Another area God has been working with us in is our giving. He has taught us to focus on blessing others with what we have.

Do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.

—Hebrews 13:16

Whenever God uses me to bless someone, and I am excited and not reluctant, God blesses me above what I give. For example, I once received word of a man who lost his job and his wife said they needed fresh fruits and vegetables for their son's medical condition. I was able to provide for them, so I was excited when I bought a variety of fruits and vegetables to take to her family. She later wrote to me and told me she was grateful, and it was more than she expected.

Soon after my neighbor brought us boxes full of fresh fruits and vegetables, and continued bringing them throughout the summer. It was an amazing blessing to me. I gave so little compared to what God gave me in return. It's like Proverbs 11:24 says, "One man gives freely, yet gains even more; another withholds unduly, but comes to poverty."

In reality, it's unwise for us not to give. We not only leave in lack those who are in need, but we also leave ourselves in lack.

[Remember] this: he who sows sparingly and grudgingly will also reap sparingly and grudgingly, and he who sows generously [that blessings may come to someone] will also reap generously and with blessings.

—2 Corinthians 9:6, AMP

When we give with a pure motive, wanting to bless others, we will reap blessings in return. Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 9:7-8, "Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so

that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.”

I couldn't give to others freely and joyfully until God worked in my heart and I saw what He's given me. I believe one area Satan deceives us is in our giving. He takes what God teaches and tries to convince us it's burdensome.

When I first started walking with God I forced my husband to give ten percent of his income, which he did grudgingly every paycheck. We did this until our bank account was empty and our debt piled up. Because we were doing it legalistically, instead of out of our love for God, we didn't see it working in our lives.

I felt God tell me to back down and give what my husband allowed me to give. I knew God didn't want me to force my husband to give. God taught me that we were not under the law and He was not going to punish me if I wasn't giving a set amount. God knew my heart was for Him and for helping others. I needed to be patient as He worked with us until we could be more of a blessing.

God also had to teach me discernment, because I would give to anyone with a need. I remember charging something on a high balance credit card I couldn't pay off to give someone. I know that wasn't God's will because Romans 13:8 tells us not to let any debt remain outstanding. It is not God's will for us to have debt we can't afford. It's okay to use credit cards, but if we can't afford to pay them off or down, the debt will continue to increase. That's how we lived the majority of our marriage, in escalating debt. God had to teach me to come to Him first and ask Him to show me what to give and who to give to. God often told me an amount and when I asked my husband if I could give, he would agree and usually be thinking the same amount, which confirmed I was hearing correctly from God.

As God was teaching us, I asked Him to show me other ways to be a blessing to others. God started providing me with opportunities to give by either donating clothing or food, or cooking a meal for someone. I started seeing Him work in our hearts and providing us with several opportunities to lower our bills and our spending. As we pursued those opportunities, we began to have more so we could bless others more.

God even lowered the bills we thought could not be lowered. We are still amazed at how God has taught us to live within our means, pay off our debt, and still be able to give. We weren't able to do that on our own. By seeing God bless us, it's now exciting to give to others and honor God with what He's given us.

If you and your spouse don't agree on what to give, and you are giving

grudgingly, ask God to help you agree on what to give, where to give, and when to give. If your spouse is an unbeliever, pray and talk with your spouse about what they would allow you to give. God will honor your unity and work with you to be a blessing to others.

Honoring God

Tithing was mandatory under Old Testament law. In the New Testament Jesus rebuked the Pharisees for giving a tenth of everything but neglecting the more important matters of the law like justice, mercy, and faithfulness. He said they should practice the latter, without neglecting the former (Matthew 23:23). We are still supposed to give because giving is used to further God's kingdom, bless others, and meet peoples' needs. But if our giving isn't motivated by God's love, it's not honoring God and we gain nothing.

If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.

—1 Corinthians 13:3

If we focus on giving our money, but treat our families poorly, our giving doesn't honor God. If we give all we have to help others, but don't have time for God, we are not honoring Him. If we give to everyone else while our families are hurting and struggling, we are not honoring God. First Timothy 5:8 says, "If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever."

Honoring God says, *"Lord, You are truly amazing. I praise You for caring for my family and meeting our needs. I want to honor You with all You have given us. Help me not to waste what You've provided. Show me the needs You have prepared for me to meet today, and help me bring glory to You by being obedient in every way. Help me to walk in Your will for my life, in total obedience from the inside out. I Praise You Lord for giving so much to me that I joyfully give in return to You."*

Giving has to come from a humble, pure, obedient heart in order to be honoring to God.

Humility and the fear of the LORD bring wealth and honor and life.

—Proverbs 22:4

Because we got ourselves into a mess early in our marriage, and our bills were more than our income, I wasn't able to give all I wanted to give when I came to know Christ. My husband refused to allow me to give away money we didn't have, especially since we were drowning in debt. I found that honoring God meant obeying Him by keeping peace between my husband and me.

I also found that honoring God meant following His direction when He was teaching us how to be good stewards with our finances. By working with God to manage properly everything He has given us, it has brought us far more results than when we grudgingly gave while living in strife. I believe the more we move in this direction the more God will work in our hearts and bring us blessings and increase our giving, as we already see Him doing.

I am no longer afraid God is mad at me and not blessing me because I am not giving a certain amount. If you are in this situation, don't allow Satan to deceive you into going against your spouse because you think God is mad at you for not giving enough. God would love us if we didn't give a penny. He's not mad at us. He tells us to give for our benefit and the benefit of others. God knows your heart and He knows your spouse's heart. He is able to meet and exceed your needs so you can meet the needs of others.

Giving is a privilege. How amazing it is to be a part of furthering God's kingdom and meeting needs! Start where you are able. As you are faithful with little God will give you more (Luke 16:10). It may take awhile to get your finances in order like God did with us. But as you follow His plan you will see Him moving you in the right direction.

Follow God closely and take those opportunities He reveals to lower your spending and live within your means. Meanwhile, do your best to keep strife out of your home. Don't let Satan destroy your marriage over money. It's not worth it. Trust that God wants to provide for your family. And He has a plan that is right for you.

Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.

—1 Timothy 6:17-19

***Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting; but a woman
who fears the LORD is to be praised.
—Proverbs 31:30***

CHAPTER FIVE
WHAT MEN NEED

Learning His Needs

F

or years I tried to give my husband what I thought he needed. I didn't ask if it was what he wanted. I assumed I knew. Communication is vital. We should ask our husbands what they need, and we should tell them what we need.

One woman in my survey explained how she and her husband communicate their needs: "I do my best to listen to what he wants and needs. I also try my best to let him know what I want and need because, after all, neither of us is a mind reader."

Another woman said she and her husband make a list once or twice a year detailing their desires, wants, needs, and expectations. Then they swap notes and talk about their goals. I thought that was a great idea. Writing things down makes them easier to remember. We can then refer to our lists and be reminded of our and our spouses' needs.

As I surveyed men about what they needed from their wives, I discovered they shared many of the same needs as each other. Some men may value one need over another, but I believe all are important needs. As we learn what our husbands need and start meeting their needs, they'll be more likely to meet our needs. It's the same for the husbands. As you pursue meeting your wife's needs, she'll more likely desire to meet your needs as well.

Sincere Love

Love is a need everyone values most. But, as Romans 12:9 explains, love must be sincere. Everything we do for our spouses has to come from unconditional love, because many days we won't feel like meeting their needs. Love is the root from which all other actions need to stem. You can't go through the motions without your motive being love. Otherwise, it will not be sincere.

My husband can tell when I am doing something for him out of obligation instead of love. I can tell as well, because I don't feel fulfilled meeting that need; I feel resentful. But when I choose to meet his needs out of love, I start to desire to meet more of his needs.

When you live for others out of unconditional love, you will be fulfilled and satisfied. But when you do things for others out of obligation and expectation, you will feel resentment because not everyone will treat you the way you want them to.

Jesus told us the second most important command, next to loving God, is to love others. Everything has to come out of love to be sincere.

Dear children, we must show love through actions that are sincere....

—1 John 3:18, GW

True love is not based on feelings. True love is based on knowing God unconditionally loves us and He is able to supply all our needs. God meeting my needs means that my satisfaction and expectations are in Him alone, not in what people do or don't do for me.

When my husband doesn't meet my needs, I can still find fulfillment knowing God loves me and meets my needs (Philippians 4:19). I can pray and trust God to work in my husband's heart to meet my needs. But if my husband doesn't meet my needs, I can still feel satisfied knowing God cares about my needs. Then I can focus on meeting my husband's needs freely without demanding anything in return.

This doesn't mean it's always easy to meet my husband's needs. Some days it's hard to love my husband unconditionally, especially when I am feeling

neglected by him. When I have a need my husband isn't meeting, I try to go out of my way and do something nice for him. This helps take my mind off me and lifts me out of self-pity.

John 15:13 says that greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life (his own needs) for his friends (for others). How strong would marriages and families be today if we all loved the way Jesus loves us? So when our spouses want us to love them, this is the kind of love they need.

When I focus on meeting my husband's needs, I see God working in his heart, giving him the desire to meet my needs. For instance, I was sitting at the dinner table with my husband recently when I thought, "*I wish he would thank me for dinner.*" My husband normally doesn't say anything about the dinners I cook. I wasn't mad at him and didn't say anything, but it was one of those days when I was feeling unappreciated. I am not a good cook, so I laughed to myself thinking, "*I probably wouldn't compliment my cooking either.*" Therefore I brushed it off.

Well, the next day at dinner, which was nothing special, the same typical meal, my husband thanked me for dinner and told me how much he appreciated me. I was shocked! I had never mentioned it to anyone. How could he have known except from God?

God is amazing! He cares about all our needs, even something as small as a "*Thank you*" when we need it. I could've gotten mad and dwelt on how unappreciated I was, and wallowed in self-pity. If I had, it would've caused me to be rude to my husband. And that wouldn't have solved anything. It would have only pushed him away.

When we respond that way, it gets us nowhere because we still won't get our needs met. But then we'll also have to deal with the anger raging in us. God was working in me in that situation to believe the best and trust Him by keeping a good attitude.

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, 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

We can always check to see if our actions are motivated by love because

these will be the fruit of our actions. When we are motivated by love, we will not be impatient, angry, rude, or resentful.

Respect

As I was studying love one day, I kept thinking about how 1 Corinthians 13:7 says, “Love...always protects.” I asked God what it meant to protect someone. I felt Him tell me it meant to protect all that concerns a person. God showed me when I talked bad about someone I wasn’t protecting them, because I wasn’t protecting their reputation. Likewise, if someone is gossiping about another to me, it’s my responsibility to protect them, by protecting their reputation. I need to stand up for them in their defense.

Many couples bash their spouses to others. They proudly share their spouses’ flaws and mistakes. We need to protect our spouses’ reputations and build them up to others. Wouldn’t we want them to do the same for us?

I know a girl who praises her husband to others no matter what. She always has something good to say even though he is not perfect. Our relationships will be stronger if we live our lives protecting people’s reputations, and building others up instead of tearing them down. People will know they can trust us. And they’ll more likely speak well of us and protect our reputations.

Our husbands need to see that we respect them and are proud of them. Ephesians 5:33 says that a husband must love his wife as he loves himself. And the wife must respect her husband. My husband and I attended a Bible study years ago on this verse. I have heard women misinterpret this verse and become defensive and say, “*Well a man should respect his wife too.*”

We learned through this study that men and women see things differently. For example, when I build my husband up, by letting him know how much I appreciate him for being our provider, I am showing him respect, which he views as me showing love toward him.

This is how men want women to show their love to them, by respecting them. I, however, see my husband showing love toward me in more physical ways, like going out of his way to romance me, helping me with the housework, and helping me take care of our kids. His acts of love show me that he respects me. We are both showing love and respect, but in different ways.

One woman explained how she shows her husband respect, “I try to make sure he knows that I appreciate all that he does to take care of me, not just monetarily, but with the remodeling of our home and even car repairs.”

Just a little “I appreciate all that you do” is what our husbands need and

want. It will motivate them to be better providers, better fathers, and better husbands if they have us cheering and encouraging them through life. Showing appreciation and building them up with affirmation will make our husbands want to do more for us.

The wise woman builds her house, but with her own hands the foolish one tears hers down.

—Proverbs 14:1

When we build our husbands up, we are using wisdom. But we are foolish to ourselves, and our families, when we tear our husbands down. Even if my husband doesn't do everything the way I think he should, I can still find ways to encourage him in his weaknesses and magnify his strengths. I can show him proper respect so he can strive to be all that God called him to be.

While I was thirty-seven weeks pregnant with our fourth child, I was laid up and my husband was left to handle everything. As I was telling him to do this and that, and do it this way and that way, I stopped myself. I realized even if he didn't do everything the way I wanted him to, at least he was making an effort.

So instead I told him how much I appreciated him and let him handle the kids and the house the way he wanted to. Even as my toddler walked into my bedroom with his pants soaked, telling me he wet on the porch, I had to smile and trust that my husband was trying his best.

We need to work with our husbands instead of expecting them to do everything the way we do it. We especially need to respect them in front of our children. If we don't respect our spouses, our children won't respect them.

We also need to respect our husbands because it reflects on them. I read an article on how men want respect because it affects how they see themselves. Men place a lot of weight on their wives' opinion. Many men say they just want to know they're making their wives happy.

My husband tells me all the time, if I'm happy, he's happy. If I'm not happy, he holds it against himself. He feels responsible as a husband to make sure he's doing his best to make me happy. We shouldn't take advantage of that and put the impossible burden on our husbands to make us happy. We should be easier on them and believe in them even when they mess up. Our husbands want to feel like they are everything to us. They want to know we love them despite their faults.

Support

We also show respect to our husbands by supporting them. We should stand by each other supporting and encouraging one another. When there is a decision to be made, and my husband is firm on what he believes is the right decision, I need to support him, even if I don't agree.

Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.

—Colossians 3:18

A lot of women take this verse offensively. But we already know the Bible is a guide for our own good. Therefore, if we look at this as being for our own good, we can see that controlling everything will only push our husbands away. When we tell our husbands, "I trust you are making the right decision based on what you have in your heart. I am standing beside you on this. Even if it ends up being the wrong decision, we can work it out together."

This is what a husband and wife are supposed to do, come together as a team. One woman said, "The secret to a happy marriage is to be respectfully married together, side by side, one flesh, helping one another meet life's challenges."

There are many times when I feel strongly about something and my husband does go with what I want. I believe this is because he knows I will go with his decision when he feels strongly. It helps him trust my decisions because he knows I am not just trying to push for my way. We are not on opposite teams. We are on the same team with the same goals. This verse is meant to bring unity, not division.

When we were building our house, my husband had an idea how he wanted the outside to look with the right colors and material that would fit well together. I, of course, had a different idea. After discussing our ideas, my husband was still set on his idea. He kept telling me to trust him because he was sure I would love it.

I did trust him and thank God, because six years later I am still in love with my house. Often when I pull in the driveway, I look at it and am thankful I listened to my husband. My husband's way may not always end up being the

right way. But truly supporting someone is supporting them even when they make mistakes. Don't rub their faces in their mistakes, with an "I told you so" attitude. Instead, encourage them not to make the same mistakes again. This is Biblical submission.

Ephesians 5:21 says, "Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ." Knowing that you could have your way, but you choose to obey God, is true submission. When we submit to our husbands we are submitting to Christ.

Understanding

Another need men shared was their wives to be more understanding, not to hold grudges, and not be quick to argue.

When angry, do not sin; do not ever let your wrath (your exasperation, your fury or indignation) last until the sun goes down. Leave no [such] room or foothold for the devil [give no opportunity to him].

—Ephesians 4:26-27, AMP

When we hold grudges, we open the door for Satan. Proverbs 21:9 says, “Better to live on a corner of the roof than share a house with a quarrelsome wife.” And Proverbs 21:19 says, “Better to live in a desert than with a quarrelsome and ill-tempered wife.”

When we are constantly nagging our husbands for every little thing, these verses show there’s nothing more miserable to them. Do we want to make our husbands that miserable?

I honestly don’t think most of us intend to argue. Most arguments start because men and women perceive things differently. For example, if I ask my husband if my outfit looks good and he says it looks fine, he means it looks good. I take it, however, as if it doesn’t look good and he doesn’t like it. Then, I get upset because I think he doesn’t like it and he’s irritated because he never said he didn’t like it.

He walks away because he knows he can’t win and I want him to stay and talk about it. Men see it as women want to argue and women see it as men don’t care about their feelings. Both of us can avoid these arguments by simply understanding that we perceive things differently.

This is where believing the best will help us avoid these kinds of arguments. There are many times when I’m on fire and ready to explode at my husband. I have to walk away and pray for God’s help. When I calm down, I see how stupid the argument was and that my accusations and assumptions may have been wrong.

Many times we argue with each other over what we believe the other’s

intentions and thoughts were. How do we know what the other person is thinking? First Corinthians 13:7 says, “Love...is ever ready to believe the best of every person...” (AMP). It’ll save us many arguments if we believe the best in our spouses.

Trust in the Best

As with my pregnancy story, a common problem women have with their husbands is trusting them to take care of their children. Again, we can't expect our husbands to do everything the way we do. In general, they focus on getting the job done, and we are more detail oriented in this area.

If I leave for the evening and my husband is left to feed our kids and put them to bed, he will do it differently than I would. He would feed them something quick, probably pizza, a sandwich, or cereal. I would've fed them a full meal in all the food groups. He might do all the dishes, or maybe half, or maybe none if he wanted to play with our kids. I would've done all the dishes, vacuumed the floor, and cleaned the kids up.

Bedtime would be falling asleep on the couch with dad. If he put them in their beds, the ones old enough to know to put their pajamas on would, the others would be in bed the way they were dressed when I left. Teeth may be brushed, but again only the ones old enough to do it by themselves. I, however, would've made sure each one had a snack and drink before bed. I would've brushed and flossed each child, put pajamas on all, and put clean diapers on the ones who needed it.

Both of us accomplished the same thing. The kids were cared for and fed and put in bed. As long as it gets done, does it matter that he skipped a few steps? Though I hope my husband is never left to raise our children on his own, they might wind up being unhealthy with a mouth full of cavities. However, if my husband has to take over everything once in a while, it's not going to hurt them. We have to stop trying to make our husbands do everything our way and nag them if they don't. They just see things differently and miss things we don't.

I'm still amazed sometimes at how different my husband and I see things. We could be at the same place, at the same time, see the same thing happen, and yet see something completely different. Sometimes I'm dumbfounded to the point that I think one of us has to have lost our mind.

I can be positively sure I'm right about something, and my husband's positively sure he's right. If we don't drop it, it almost always causes an argument and turns into a knock down drag out.

Don't have anything to do with foolish and stupid arguments,
because you know they produce quarrels.

—2 Timothy 2:23

Probably 99% of our arguments are foolish and stupid. Recently my husband and I were out together and arguing about how much we spent on healthcare. My tax preparer called and asked me to give her the amount when I got home so she could do our taxes. I was sure of my number and my husband was sure of his. Instead of waiting until we got home to look up the exact amounts, we kept arguing.

As the argument escalated, we saw where it was headed and decided to stop. When we got home and looked up the total we found out we were both wrong. If we hadn't stopped the argument, it could've ruined our day out together. In the past, we wouldn't have dropped it, but thank God we have grown. Remember this next time a stupid argument comes up. It will only make you both look foolish, like it did us.

This is where trust comes in. Trust that your husband believes he's right and is most likely not arguing to fight with you. Our husbands want to know we trust them. Sometimes, even when I know I am right, I have to humble myself and trust my husband. Trust doesn't always mean I have to agree with him. I need to trust that he perceives himself to be right as much as I do.

God has taught me that I don't have to prove I am right. Instead of trying to convince my husband I am right. I can trust God to show my husband I am right. I've had incidents when I submitted even though I knew without a doubt I was right, and God revealed the truth to my husband. But I've also had many incidents when God did not reveal it to my husband.

Through those times God worked humility in me and helped me trust in Him and in my husband. Believing the best in our spouses helps us trust in the best and trust God for the rest.

Of course this doesn't mean we are to be naïve. If there's a reason for not trusting your spouse, you need to confront it. God doesn't call us to be doormats for others to walk over us. However, if there isn't a reason to distrust your spouse and you're struggling with it, you need God's help. God will help you heal from whatever caused the mistrust and get to the root of it.

I struggled with mistrust for years in our marriage. It caused distance between us, and was one of the main things that almost destroyed our marriage. It traces back to unforgiveness and bringing up past hurts. Once those hurts are

dealt with, and as you learn to put your trust in God, He can help you regain trust in others. One woman said, “I trust God when I do not trust my husband.” We can trust God to bring anything that is wrong out into the open.

In my case, the root cause was jealousy from my insecurity, holding on to unforgiveness, and past hurts. These made it hard for me to trust my husband, even though he gave me no reason to distrust him. Also, it was situations we put ourselves in which fed those feelings of distrust. When you are hanging around places where temptations are high, as in bars, it’s inevitably going to cause lack of trust. Just stepping away from that lifestyle helped me to start trusting again.

Many times it was also my thoughts and assumptions that led me to distrust. It’s important to pray we are not being deceived and misled by our own thoughts. We need to communicate with our spouses if we have a concern about trust, and not follow our assumptions. I encourage you to go to your spouse with your concerns about trust, and work together to regain it if it’s lost.

There are many factors in trust. Yet, overall, our husbands want us to trust that they’ll make right choices. When they don’t, we can trust God will work it out. It takes the burden off of us because that’s what it was to me all those years, a heavy burden, worrying and not trusting. Now I can trust that God is in control, and if I need to say or do anything, He will show me.

Honesty

Honesty was on the top of the list of almost every man that answered my survey. I believe the main area where women fail to be honest with their husbands is with their feelings. We almost expect our husbands to know what we want. If they don't give us what we want, we tend to hold a grudge against them. Then, they have no idea what they did wrong in the first place. It goes back again to communication. We need to communicate our feelings to our husbands.

One man said his wife is his best friend and they truly share everything. That's how we should be with our spouses. We should be honest with them in everything, hiding nothing.

Dishonesty is a perversion of the truth. When we hide something, we are not being truthful, so it's the same as telling a lie. The Bible tells us that God hates a lying tongue (Proverbs 6:16-17). It also tells us that Satan is the father of lies (John 8:44). So when we are dishonest, we are in agreement with Satan, doing what he desires.

Rather, let our lives lovingly express truth [in all things, speaking truly, dealing truly, living truly]. Enfolded in love, let us grow up in every way and in all things into Him Who is the Head, [even] Christ (the Messiah, the Anointed One).

—Ephesians 4:15, AMP

It is God's will for us to live by the truth. First Timothy 1:5 reveals why: "Whereas the object and purpose of our instruction and charge is love, which springs from a pure heart and a good (clear) conscience and sincere (unfeigned) faith" (AMP).

Our purpose in Christ is to love. We remember that love has to come out of a pure heart. These are the things that prevent us from having a pure heart, so we can't overlook them. If you are in Christ, you will know when you're being dishonest, just like you know when you're speaking truthfully. Romans 9:1 says, "I speak the truth in Christ—I am not lying, my conscience confirms it in the Holy Spirit."

If you don't yield to the Holy Spirit's conviction, you will hinder God's love

from flowing through you. Therefore, you will not walk in what you profess even if you try. Sincere (unfeigned) faith means non-hypocritical faith. Love can only spring from a non-hypocritical heart. Our hearts will not be sincere if we are dishonest.

Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart.

—1 Peter 1:22

People often don't understand why they can't love like Christ tells us to. Yet they are living dishonestly. They think a little white lie here and there does no harm. Or a little stretching the truth isn't a big deal. Or just hiding trivial things from their spouses is nothing to be concerned about.

We can't experience and express God's fullness of His love when we are not walking in integrity. I couldn't love my husband like I wanted to when I was dishonest with him. Even what I may have thought were small things, like hiding purchases. Or what he said once hurt me and I hid it from him by holding on to anger. All those things hindered me from fully expressing God's love.

We must pay more careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away.

—Hebrews 2:1

We need to take everything we learn from the Bible seriously, not overlooking anything God teaches us. The more we overlook, the more we drift away. The small things are what Satan uses to slowly pull our hearts away from God, and our spouses.

We need to walk in integrity in everything. If you are honest in everything, your spouse will likely be honest with you. Ask God to show you where you've been dishonest, and ask Him to bring to light any areas of dishonesty in your spouse as well.

Reverence for the Lord

We won't be able to walk in integrity if we are not dependent on God, because we can't do it on our own. Psalm 86:11a says, "Teach me your way, O LORD, and I will walk in your truth." I believe this is the number one thing our husbands need. They need us to have a personal, daily relationship with Jesus.

Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting; but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised.

—Proverbs 31:30

When someone fears the Lord they live to please God alone. A woman who fears the Lord is careful to follow God, no matter what's going on around her. She knows she will have to one day stand before Him and give an account of her life.

First Peter 4:1 says, "SO, SINCE Christ suffered in the flesh for us, for you, arm yourselves with the same thought and purpose [patiently to suffer rather than fail to please God]..." (AMP).

When a woman truly fears the Lord, the Bible will be the standard she lives by, not the world's standard. Her heart and mind will be completely devoted to God. Her whole being, her thoughts, her heart, her actions will all be aimed in one direction, God's.

A wife of noble character who can find? She is worth far more than rubies. Her husband has full confidence in her and lacks nothing of value. She brings him good, not harm, all the days of her life.

—Proverbs 31:10-12

Women often view the "Proverbs 31" wife as perfect and impossible to measure up to. The "Proverbs 31" wife has often been perceived way out of balance from what the Bible intended it. Some see the focus as having to accomplish everything and do it all. The kind of wife it's talking about is a wife whose total dependence is on God and she lives in reverence to Him. As a result,

she is able to do it all. Not by her strength and might, but by God's power and strength.

It's comparable to the Mary and Martha story in Luke 10:38-42. Martha was distracted by working and doing what needed to be done. She didn't take a rest to sit at the feet of Jesus when she had the opportunity. Mary, however, did stop and put Jesus first.

I often like to say that when I'm a Mary, God helps me to be a Martha. I say that to mean when I'm resting my cares and worries in God, and putting Jesus before everything else, God helps me accomplish all the other things that need to be done in my day.

Martha wasn't wrong in serving. She had a heart for Jesus, but it was a divided heart. Psalm 86:11b says, "...give me an undivided heart, that I may fear your name." Mary's heart was undivided toward Jesus. She had all her focus on Jesus, not on herself. The "Proverbs 31" wife's heart is undivided toward God. She truly fears the Lord. That is the reason her household is blessed.

By spending time daily with God, learning His ways, and applying them to my life, He's made me more beautiful to my husband than I ever was before, no matter how much I worked on my outward appearance. God is changing my whole personality into a more enjoyable, loving, caring, and gentle spirit. I can't do anything I'm sharing with you in this book if I don't have God's help daily. I know, because I tried to do it without God and it doesn't work.

We can no more eat enough today for tomorrow than can we go a day without God. Remember Jesus said in John 15:5, "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing." A branch that breaks off and is on its own withers up quickly and dies. The negative things around us pollute us daily. We need to stay connected to God.

In Matthew 13:20-21, Jesus was explaining the meaning of a parable He told about the sower and the seed, "The one who received the seed that fell on rocky places is the man who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away."

A branch that leaves the vine is not rooted. It has no root unless it is connected to the vine continually. That is how a divided heart is. It comes and goes from the vine, but is never fully attached (rooted). It is weak and malnourished, so it quickly falls away during a storm. We need to be connected to God. Only in Him are we rooted and secure.

When I asked in my survey, “What do you believe plays a major role in the success of your marriage and raising your children?” a majority of those who answered attributed their success to putting God at the center of their family.

One woman wrote, “Without having God in my life my marriage would not have lasted this long. Without having the forgiveness and loving spirit that God has given me I don’t know if we would still be married.”

Another woman wrote, “Jesus is the one and only key to a good marriage and being a good mother.” Another wrote, “I believe to be truly happy together a relationship has to be founded on the Lord. When two people know the Lord and live to please Him, their relationship will be blessed as well.”

It’s not only wives who need to put God first, but husbands as well. Of course, you can’t make your husband put God first, but you can help lead him to God by being an example. I struggled in this area as well. The more I grew with God, the more I gained a self-righteous attitude toward my husband’s growth. I wanted him to be where I thought I was spiritually.

Who are you to judge someone else’s servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand.

—Romans 14:4

God quickly humbled me and showed me that I didn’t choose Him. He chose me. I am no better than anyone else. He is able to work in my husband the same as He is working in me. It is God who makes us stand, not us. God works in each of us in His time and in His own way.

Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother’s way.

—Romans 14:13

We make it harder for people to grow when we judge their faith. We will be more effective reaching our spouses when we allow them to see God in us, instead of judging them and pushing them to be more spiritual. If your spouse never wants to follow God, you can’t give up and allow it to affect your growth. You can still move forward and grow in Christ and allow Him to use you.

If you have an unbelieving spouse, you will be more effective in leading him to Christ through your daily walk rather than preaching to him day and night, which only pushes him further from Jesus and you.

...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. Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as braided hair and the wearing of gold jewelry and fine clothes. Instead, 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.

—1 Peter 3:1-4

When you put God first and strive to be all He's called you to be, your whole character changes. You will be truly beautiful from the inside out. I had anything but a gentle, quiet spirit before God starting working in me. The reason my husband is more attracted to me now is because God is changing my character. Character far outweighs looks.

A virtuous and worthy wife [earnest and strong in character] is a crowning joy to her husband, but she who makes him ashamed is as rottenness in his bones.

—Proverbs 12:4, AMP

Care for Ourselves

Just because 1 Peter 3:1-4 says our beauty shouldn't come from makeup and external things, it doesn't mean we shouldn't take care of ourselves. Many women said they sacrificed taking care of themselves in order to take care of their families.

One woman wrote, "How many times do we as moms give up sleep, food, and extras so that our children and husbands can have." Another wrote, "I have actually been hospitalized due to illness. I attribute it to overworking and taking care of everyone else." Another also wrote, "I have practically forgotten about my needs and desires in order to maintain what they need."

I found this to be a struggle for me as well, to find time to take care of myself. Yet I believe it's important to make it a priority. Our families need us to be healthy. When we are taking care of ourselves, we feel better about ourselves. When I work out and eat healthy, I feel better, have more energy, and I feel confident rather than insecure.

When I feel I look my best, I want to eat better and stay healthier. When I am not taking care of myself, I don't like how I look and then I feel insecure around my husband. How we think we look affects how we feel about ourselves.

If we don't take time for ourselves, we'll resent the ones we're giving all our time to care for—our husbands and children. We don't have to sacrifice our health and self-esteem for our families. Instead, we can motivate them to be healthy and take better care of themselves. After all, don't we want our husbands to be healthy and look their best as well?

It doesn't take as much time as we think to take care of ourselves. My husband does push-ups almost daily. It only takes him a few minutes, but making that a priority helps him feel better and builds his strength. Many times as I'm doing chores around the house, I'll do various exercises. Sometimes I'll do workout videos with my children. It's comical and fun, and we all get healthy together.

You don't have to afford a gym membership to be healthy. You can do little things with what you have. I've even found that eating five smaller meals a day rather than two big ones helps boost my metabolism and gives me more energy. Keeping healthier foods in our house and limiting the amount of junk food I bring in helps me and my family eat better. Making a conscience effort to eat

fruits and vegetables when I take the time to cut some up for my children also helps me.

It's not about being a certain size. It's about loving ourselves and our families enough to take care of ourselves and not neglect our health. It's also about taking a rest when we need it and not trying to put our family's needs ahead of our health needs. We're only hurting our families when we do that. We should make it a priority to take time out for us. That's not being selfish.

Intimacy

Another need men shared was affection and intimacy from their wives. One man clarified that it isn't necessarily sex. My husband expresses his love for me by being affectionate. Many times his complaint is that I'm always rushing around taking care of the kids that I don't stop to show him affection. I've noticed when I try to be more affectionate it draws him closer to me.

I also like our children to see us be affectionate with each other. It gives them a sense of security in our family when they see we love each other. One man explained how his relationship with his wife makes his children feel secure, "Our kids see us happy together and the model of what a loving marriage should be. They can see in the way we interact that we love each other and are committed to our family." Being loving and affectionate with our spouses benefits us and our families.

Men also say they want their wives to initiate intimacy. One man wrote, "I need my wife to still pursue me."

The wife's body does not belong to her alone but also to her husband. In the same way, the husband's body does not belong to him alone but also to his wife. Do not deprive each other except by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.

—1 Corinthians 7:4-5

It is important to make it a priority to be intimate with our spouses. When we refuse to be intimate it opens the door to temptations. That special bond of love keeps us close with our spouses. It draws us deeper in love with each other.

I believe that being insecure with how we look and not feeling good physically keeps us from wanting to be intimate with our husbands. Taking care of ourselves will help us feel better about ourselves and help us enjoy being intimate more. When we enjoy our husbands more, they will enjoy us more.

I also believe that making too many commitments and being busy wears us down so we don't have the time or energy to be intimate. Asking God to help us

cut out some unfruitful things taking up too much of our time will take a burden off us. And we'll enjoy our spouses more when we're not so worn out.

There can be other factors that keep us from wanting to be intimate with our spouses (i.e. past affairs, sexual abuse, etc.). If you struggle in this area, God can help you with whatever is hindering you from being intimate with your spouse. Seek God. He is faithful to help you and heal you in this area.

Caring Heart

Another need men shared was for their wives to be loving and caring toward their children. This is probably the main thing that's important to my husband—how I treat our children. Now that God is changing me, my husband frequently expresses his gratitude for the way I care for our children.

Our commitment to our children and the way we care for them is a way of loving our husbands. One man said he needs his wife to continue to be a great role model for their children. He also said he needs her to continue to support his own children emotionally, because this is their second marriage for both.

This is a common problem in blended family homes. Most of the stepparents I surveyed said they don't have the same relationship with their stepchildren as they do with their biological children. Favoritism is also a big obstacle blended families experience. One woman said there is a big difference between her husband's relationship with her children from a previous marriage and their child together.

Even though you may have a closer natural bond to your children, it's still important to show your husband's children the same love, whether they want to receive it or not. By trying your best to love them unconditionally, you are showing your husband love and respect.

Husbands, the same goes for you. Make a continuous effort to love your wives' children as unconditionally as you do your own.

If a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand.

—Mark 3:25

...a house divided against itself will fall.

—Luke 11:17

When there's division in a family, the family will fall apart. You are now one with your spouse. You need to communicate and work as one to show the children stability and unity. The children especially need this after going through a divorce already. They need extra assurance their security won't be taken away again.

Friendship

It's important we continue to work on our relationships with our spouses, so we can positively impact our children. Many of the men who were surveyed said they desired to have fun and laugh with their wives. They want to enjoy being with their wives.

My husband is truly my best friend. We have a lot of fun together and we miss each other when we are apart. When we are together, we love to joke and laugh. My husband is a jokester and though sometimes I want him to be serious, I love that he keeps life enjoyable with his sense of humor. He always knows how to put a smile on my face. Loosening up and enjoying life without taking everything too seriously has helped me in my relationship with my husband.

When asked, "What plays a major role in the success of your family," one woman answered, "My husband and I are really great friends and we make each other laugh a lot!" One man answered, "Try not to take life too serious, add humor each day to lighten the mood." Enjoying each other and each day together draws us closer to our spouses.

It also helps me enjoy my husband when I go out of my way to do special things for him. It makes him feel loved and I enjoy making him happy. One woman wrote how she enjoys doing kind things for her husband. She explained, "I try hard to do kind things for my husband as often as possible. Some examples include making homemade meals and treats, writing notes, leaving sweet voicemail messages to him."

Another woman wrote, "Finding little things in each day that will bring joy or even just comfort to my husband. Getting up early to see him off to work, bringing his coffee to him in the morning, *etc.* I try to let him pick the dinner menu too, just one more small thing to try to make his days brighter. If we look for ways to do things like that each day, and continually put the other spouse first, I believe that leads to a happy marriage."

When my husband and I were first dating, when pagers were popular, we would page each other "143," which stood for "I love you." To this day, when he's at work or out somewhere, I'll text him "143." It takes only a second, but that little gesture tells him I'm thinking about him. Making an effort to go out of our way to do something nice for our husbands will make our marriages more enjoyable.

We can even do something as simple as listen to our husbands, by giving them our undivided attention, to show we care about them. This is another thing I struggle with. I get too busy with everyday things and I often forget to stop what I'm doing to listen to my husband.

One woman said she greets her husband at the door when he comes home from work and listens to him about his work, even though she's not particularly interested in his job. I can relate. My husband works in a field where I have no knowledge or interest. But when I listen to him, and try to care about what he cares about, it draws me closer to him.

I'm sure he's not that interested in what I do all day either. The least I can do is listen to him. This opens the door to good communication in our marriages. If we never listen to our spouses, chances are they'll do the same when we have something we want to talk about.

Consideration

Last, an important thing we can do for our husbands is to be considerate and understanding with their interests rather than be selfish with our own interests. My husband loves to play golf and hockey. These normally fall on the weekend when I have my plans for us. I've had to stop myself many times from telling him what we are going to do instead of asking him what he wants to do. I've learned I need to allow him to do what he enjoys.

Obviously there has to be balance. Some men get out of balance with sports and their friends to the point that they don't put their family's needs first. That's when you need to be in prayer and confront them, and trust God to help.

My husband and I have a close relationship now. Often, he admits he'd rather be with me and our kids than out doing his own thing. As I strive to meet his needs, it motivates him to meet my needs and we grow closer together wanting the same things and wanting to be together.

One woman said she fulfills the needs of her spouse by remembering that he is a man and he needs different things in life than she does. She's also learning to ask for what she needs. We need to remember that men and women are created different, so we do have different needs. As we work together, and lean on God to help us meet our spouses' needs, our marriages will be enjoyable and fulfilling.

***Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her....
—Ephesians 5:25***

CHAPTER SIX
WHAT WOMEN NEED

Spiritual Leadership

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he most important thing a woman needs from her husband is his spiritual leadership in the home.

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.

—Ephesians 5:25-27

I strive to put God first and spend time daily learning and growing in Him. This has brought great results in my life, and my children's lives, but I still need my husband to be the spiritual leader in our home. No matter how much I grow in Christ there are times when I need my husband to carry me, to minister to me and direct me, and to help lead our children.

Men have a strong influence on their children. I don't think most men realize the power they have to transform their families by being the spiritual leaders of their homes. I believe this is one of the reasons why our society is morally bankrupt today. Most fathers are not stepping up and leading their homes in the manner in which God created them to. I am not discrediting mothers. I believe both parents have a tremendous impact on their children's lives. But God created men to lead their families.

I've read studies claiming more wives are spiritual leaders in the home than husbands. Satan tries to draw a father's heart away because he knows the power a godly man has on his family. Satan knows if he can take down the leader of the home, he can take down the family.

In the Old Testament whenever Israel was ruled by a leader who didn't follow God, the people followed by worshiping idols. But when a leader turned to God, the people followed by consecrating their lives to God. If Satan can take down a nation through bad leadership, how easy would it be to take down a

family through the leader of the home? He knows if he can get the man to turn away from God, the family will likely follow.

Women, even if your husbands never choose to be the spiritual leaders of your homes, you can still stand against the enemy by leading your children. You have a choice. Don't allow Satan to influence your family while you wait for your husband to follow God. You can follow God and pray for your husband while teaching your children the right way.

Fathers have plenty of things to draw their hearts away today. With the rise in technology, there is enough entertainment to steal their time away from God and their families. They can watch an abundance of sports anytime they want. They can find anything they want to keep them busy and distracted from the family anywhere they go.

My husband says men are also constantly bombarded with sexual temptations. Whether it's through commercials, TV shows, movies, magazines, or the Internet, sexual temptations are everywhere. There are even restaurants, hair salons, and other businesses that cater to men to purposely feed that temptation.

Satan makes it appealing and men are following in droves unknowingly into his trap. Satan knows if he can distract the man from God, keeping him busy in worldly entertainment and lusts, he can steal from the family.

Psalm 128:1-4 shows why Satan lures a father's heart away from his family:

Blessed are all who fear the LORD, who walk in his ways. You will eat the fruit of your labor; blessings and prosperity will be yours. Your wife will be like a fruitful vine within your house; your sons will be like olive shoots around your table. Thus is the man blessed who fears the LORD.

When a father reverentially fears God and lives for Him, his family will benefit immeasurably. His family will be truly blessed.

I've attended many women's Bible studies, and the number one complaint I've heard is women want their husbands to put God first and lead their family. Our children look to us to show them the way. They watch us and learn from our examples. If we don't show them how to live for God by the way we live, we will send them into the world blind. They may turn to God on their own, but they will most likely find Him the hard way, after much hardship.

Husbands, your wives need you to have a daily relationship with Jesus. They

need you to pray with them, and pray with your children. Be the one who makes God the center of your family. Make Him your priority. Be the one who says, “We’re going to church together as a family each week.” Be the one who leads family devotionals and Bible studies. Christ needs to be your foundation to securely hold up the walls of your family.

One man explained how Christ is the center of his marriage, “Our marriage is a three person covenant...husband, wife and Jesus. We promised each other to always love God more than we would ever love each other. If we do that, our marriage will be successful. The purpose of our marriage is to demonstrate that relationship between God Almighty (husband) and His church (bride). If our marriage does not Glorify God then we are failing.”

There is great power and blessings in a family where both parents put God first. However, if your wife is an unbeliever you can still serve God and not allow her unbelief to filter down to your children. You can be the right role model that overrides the wrong.

To the rest I say this (I, not the Lord): If any brother has a wife who is not a believer and she is willing to live with him, he must not divorce her. And if a woman has a husband who is not a believer and he is willing to live with her, she must not divorce him. For the unbelieving husband has been sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife has been sanctified through her believing husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy.

—1 Corinthians 7:12-14

All it takes is for you alone, mother or father, to stand up and serve Christ. Don’t wait for your spouse to. First Corinthians 7:15-16 says, “But if the unbeliever leaves, let him do so. A believing man or woman is not bound in such circumstances; God has called us to live in peace. How do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? Or, how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife?”

We can’t save our spouses, but we can stand for what is right and live in obedience to God by teaching our children the right way. If our spouses don’t want to live with us because of that, they can choose to leave. We, however, are not the ones to make that decision and leave them because they don’t want to follow Christ. We can’t put a time line on when Jesus can change their hearts.

You can still live for God. You can still lead your children. And you can still enjoy your life. Your spouse will more likely see through your life that God's way is the right way.

God needs to be your priority daily. You need to study and learn from the One who is Father to all. Allowing God to help you lead your family will have a greater impact on them than anything else you can do. There's nothing more attractive to your wife than for you to be the strong, godly leader you were created to be.

Women, if your husbands are saved, allow them to lead your home and encourage them to do so. We shouldn't judge our husbands if they're not as spiritual as we think they need to be. There have been times when God spoke to me through people who were less spiritual than I *thought* I was. Those times humbled me to see that God could work through anyone at any time.

Guidance

Many women who answered my survey said they needed guidance from their husbands. It's important to spend time daily with God and follow Him wholeheartedly, so nothing hinders you from receiving His guidance. God gives you guidance so you can guide your family. If you are not connected to God to receive His guidance, you will not be able to successfully lead your family.

Husbands, nothing hurts your wives more than not receiving godly guidance from you. We were not meant to do this on our own and we were not meant to be the leaders of our homes. Proverbs 11:14 says, "For lack of guidance a nation falls..." and verse 24:6 says, "For waging war you need guidance..."

Situations arise every day. If we think we can handle them in our own wisdom, we are foolish and we will fail. We face many battles in life. And there's a daily war trying to destroy our families. Without seeking guidance to ensure victory in the battles we face, our families will suffer.

If you make the Most High your dwelling—even the LORD, who is my refuge—then no harm will befall you, no disaster will come near your tent. For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways;

—Psalm 91:9-11

When you make God your refuge, and stay within the boundaries of His Word, your family will be safe and secure and nothing can harm you. When you walk through life without Jesus, you are taking your family with you to war without any protection or weapons. In Jesus, you have protection and a sure victory over the Satan's attacks. Without Jesus, you have nothing. God wants to help you in your daily battles, but you have to be plugged in to receive His direction.

In the book of Ecclesiastes, Solomon tells us after trying everything the world had to offer, he realized the true purpose in life, the true way to happiness, was to know God and live his life for Him. God is the only answer to everything we face in life. Only in Him are we truly fulfilled.

All has been heard; the end of the matter is: Fear God [revere and worship Him, knowing that He is] and keep His commandments, for this is the whole of man [the full, original purpose of His creation, the object of God's providence, the root of character, the foundation of all happiness, the adjustment to all inharmonious circumstances and conditions under the sun] and the whole [duty] for every man.

—Ecclesiastes 12:13, AMP

I have heard men say they struggle to read the Bible. One man said he hates reading but he's trying to read the Bible anyway, even if he falls asleep after reading one verse. He said he is starting, for the first time, to enjoy reading a Christian book based on God's Word. He has to intentionally seek God before the desire comes. The more he seeks God, the stronger his desire will become. It's about seeking now, not waiting until you feel like it because Satan will do everything he can to keep you from feeling like it.

I led Bible studies in my home for two years. One woman told me she was interested in coming to my study; however something always came up to prevent her from attending. This went on for two years and she didn't make it to one study. Satan will never make it easy for you to seek Jesus.

You have to set your mind and know ahead of time you will face opposition. There will be roadblocks. Things will unexpectedly come up. And you will not always feel like following through. But if you are determined, nothing will be able to stop you. You can plow through that opposition when you are determined to seek God.

It was the same when I started my walk with Christ. I had a desire to learn about God, but it wasn't strong because I didn't put Him first. I had a divided heart, half for my way and half for God's way. If something came up and I didn't feel like reading my Bible, I wouldn't. I also regularly joined Bible studies and was excited at the start of the studies. But about half-way through them, I'd fall behind, give up, and never finish my workbooks. My study books remained half-completed.

My journal entry from that time read, "I don't read the Bible as much as I should and I know I miss out on what God has for me. Answers to everything are in there. I pray I stop being so lazy and start reading."

I eventually hit a point in my life when I knew I had to grow up in God if I ever wanted to see His promises come to pass. I knew I had to be determined not

to give up. When the next Bible study came around, I set my mind on finishing it, no matter what.

I had a baby in the middle of the study, earlier than expected, and had to be laid up for one week after the birth. I was still determined and worked on my workbook daily. I was back at the study the following week. The women at the study were shocked to see me back so soon after giving birth.

This study happened to be about personal revival. I know God prepared that study for me. By finishing the study with my heart undivided toward God, it birthed a strong desire in me to seek God daily. That desire has only continued to grow.

I had to set my mind to learn about Jesus before I had the strong desire to spend time with Him. Once I got to know Him, I became passionate and excited about spending time with Him. The more you make an effort to spend time with God, the more you will want to spend time with Him. At first it may be a struggle, but I assure you that as you grow closer to Him, you will get to know Him and fall madly in love with Him.

Unconditional Love

As you seek God and allow Him to work in you, you will be able to give your family the love they need. Many people say they want their spouses to love them, but in most cases their spouses aren't able to. If your spouse is not allowing God to work His love in them, they are not able to give you the love you need. That's when you need to show them God's unconditional love.

When we love like Christ we draw others to God. Second Corinthians 5:20 says, "We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us...." It was my husband's strong love for me that helped me respond to God. If my husband hadn't committed to loving me unconditionally, I wouldn't have been so eager to seek change for myself.

One woman said all she needs from her husband is love. She expressed, "With that, everything else falls into place." Love your wife as Jesus loves you, by laying down your needs for hers, and everything will fall into place. Jesus humbled Himself, denied Himself, and gave His life for us.

Romans 15:1-3 says, "We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. Each of us should please his neighbor for his good, to build him up. For even Christ did not please Himself...."

We love like Christ by humbling ourselves and lifting others up.

Love each other with genuine affection, and take delight in honoring each other.

—Romans 12:10, NLT

One man explained how he contributes to the success of his marriage: "Chiefly it is by living a life that is obedient to God. Thinking of how God would treat His bride when I look at how I treat my wife." This should be our standard in how we treat everyone. We should regularly ask ourselves, "Would I like it if God treated me this way?"

Another man wrote, "I have tried very hard to love my wife as Christ loved the church. Of course, I fail at this often!" It's about making an effort, not about being perfect. We all fail at this often. No one is perfect. My husband doesn't do everything right, but I know he tries and that's good enough. I know I don't do

everything right. And I know I don't meet all my husband's needs, but he knows I make an effort and that's what matters to him.

By making an effort, you show your wife that you love her and want to please her. Ephesians 5:33 says a husband must love his wife as he loves himself. Love your wife unconditionally. Treat her the way you want her to treat you, even if she doesn't do the same for you.

Understanding and Empathy

Loving unconditionally doesn't mean you have to agree with your wife or understand her. Understanding and empathy were two important needs women wrote about. I know we are complex and hard to figure out, but you don't have to understand us to be understanding.

For example, when I share a concern with my husband, he instantly wants to fix it by giving me a solution. I don't want him to fix everything. Most of the time I want him to listen to me and show me compassion. I'm not expecting him to understand what I'm feeling. I just want him to understand that it's important to me. I want him to listen to how I feel. He's getting better at knowing when I want a listening ear. And I'm getting better at not getting mad when he gives me a solution instead.

Women, we need to be understanding with our husbands and not get mad when they don't understand us. Do we honestly think our husbands can understand all the emotions we feel? Men, next time your wives want to talk, listen and have a little empathy to show you care about their feelings. That's all we want.

Women are more emotional than men. We tend to take things personally and get offended more easily than men. My husband gets confused trying to understand me. He says women are too complex compared to men. We need to believe the best in each other and realize we are different. God made us different to complement each other, not to bring separation.

Knowing you are made differently, so you think differently, will help you understand your wife better. It may seem to you that your wife overreacts to things, but maybe she just sees it differently. She won't see it the way you do because she is different. It may be nothing to you, but it might be something to her.

One man explained how he shows understanding to his wife: "I do not take any issues too seriously regardless of the way my wife overreacts to small situations."

In general, women are more expressive and men are more direct. We want to talk about the problem and get to the root of it, and men want to solve it and move on. If you are patient with her and remain calm, regardless of her reaction, the problem will get resolved quicker than if you keep escalating it by getting

angry. She may only want to express how she feels. By being calm and caring, you can work together to resolve the situation.

It is to a man's honor to avoid strife, but every fool is quick to quarrel.

—Proverbs 20:3

Arguing solves nothing. It only separates us more. Strife always begins when someone wants their way. All my arguments with my husband stem from one or both of us wanting to be right. James 3:16 says, "For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice."

Many households are full of disorder, and it stems from self-centeredness. One man wrote, "You must die to self. When there are dry seasons in any relationship, someone has to take the first step toward making things work." We need to be the one to take that step and do our part to keep strife out of our marriages.

I believe one of the reasons women want empathy is because we have a lot we have to do each day. We want our husbands to notice. I'm at home with children all day. Listening to a crying baby, and breaking up fights over whose toy is whose wears on me mentally and emotionally. My husband would make it worse if he came home and told me how to handle it better, or that I should try doing what he does. All I want is a little empathy.

Being a mother is a 24/7 job and it gets tiring. We spend all day doing things that have to be done again the next day. Most of the time we don't see our accomplishments until our children are grown. We then pray to see positive fruits of our labor as our children grow into adults. We are affirmed only after we have poured our lives into raising them. This can be emotionally hard during these years.

Whether your wife is at work or chauffeuring children all day, she needs to see that you notice and appreciate her. We want empathy and support from our husbands for all we do to care for our families. We don't want our husbands getting angry with us when we're emotionally falling apart. That only weighs us down more.

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

—Colossians 3:19

One man said, “I try to see the other person’s position, not through their arguments, but after reflection and consideration.” Stopping and putting ourselves in our spouses’ shoes will give us an insight into how they feel and where they are coming from. We all think we have the hardest job no matter what we do. We don’t need to play the “My job is harder than yours” game. We should show compassion and support for one another.

Telling your wife how much you appreciate all she does for your family will lift her spirit. When she’s had a hard day, sit down and listen to her and comfort her, even if you’ve had a hard day. Once again, it’s about putting your spouse’s needs above your own. This is where you will find true enjoyment and satisfaction in your marriage. It will also help you to be more empathetic when your wife doesn’t do everything the way you want her to.

One woman said she and her husband value each other’s feelings more than the task they expect from each other. We should value our spouses and show appreciation instead of picking at their faults.

Undivided Attention

Many women surveyed said they needed their husbands' attention. I like what one woman said she needed: "Eyes...when we talk, and for him to be engaged and not while watching T.V. or on the computer. I don't want to talk to the side of his face."

We want our husbands to be interested in us. Listening to your wife and giving her your undivided attention tells her she is important to you. You can also find out what your wife needs by listening to what she talks about. If she often complains about something, or frequently mentions a certain thing, that is what she needs. If you never listen to your wife, you will neglect meeting her needs. This is how many divorces and affairs get started, from lack of communication and lack of attention.

One man who has a gift for communication said women complain to him all the time about how their husbands don't talk with them or pay attention to them. It's important to listen to your wife. Otherwise, she may be drawn to another man who will listen to her. It's also important to step away from another woman if she's constantly pouring out her marriage problems on you. She may be drawn to you instead of your advice, because you're giving her what her marriage is lacking: attention.

Women also said they needed companionship, friendship, and time alone with their husbands. Plan a getaway or a date night and surprise your wife. I think all women love that. One woman wrote, "Couples tend to be happier when they are able to separate themselves from their children and find the time to have fun as a couple."

I agree with her. I love doing things as a family, but I need to go out with my husband and enjoy time alone with him. We don't get to go out as often as we would like. But when we do go out, we enjoy being together.

I have met couples that never go on dates. I find that sad. We should make it a priority to be together and spend time alone with our spouses. Going out of your way to plan a date with your wife shows her you care about her. One woman explained what she needs from her husband: "To feel loved, to have him do things for me to show his love." Telling your wife you love her is not enough. She needs to see your love by the way you treat her and the things you do for her.

When you go out of your way to plan a surprise for your wife, you are showing her you still think about her and want to impress her. As I talked about in my last chapter, I think many couples stop pursuing each other once they are married. They think there's nothing more to learn about each other. We are always changing and growing. I am still learning things about my husband. I just learned a few weeks ago that my husband can draw. I don't know how, after fifteen years of marriage, I didn't know that.

Keep getting to know your wife. Keep pursuing her as you did when you were dating. One woman said one of the things she needs from her husband is to keep things new and exciting. When couples date they do everything they can to impress each other. Then they get married and it's not a priority anymore.

One man explained how he contributed to the restoration of his marriage. He said he took the time to understand what his wife needed and fell in love with her all over again. Strive to please your wife. Strive to impress her. Strive to romance her. Make her feel like she's the world to you just like you did when you were dating. Try to remember those feelings you had for her when you first met, and rekindle those feelings.

One woman advised, "There was an attraction that brought you together and there was something about the other that caused them to fall in love with each other. During times of tribulation, it is important to look back and search for those things and feelings that brought the couples together in the first place."

Family Before Career

One man said he wished he had sacrificed time at work to spend more time with his wife. My sister's friend collapsed and died today passing the finish line of a marathon race. When something like this happens close to home, it's a reminder that we are never guaranteed tomorrow. We need to make the most of each day of our lives doing what truly matters.

If you are working so much that your marriage and children are suffering, and you have no time for them, when your children grow up resenting you and your marriage is over, what will your money and success be worth to you?

Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind....

And I saw that all labor and all achievement spring from man's envy of his neighbor. This too is meaningless, a chasing after the wind.

—Ecclesiastes 2:11, 4:4

When making money and achieving success are your goals in life, it is the same as chasing after something that can never be caught. It is a complete waste of time. One woman wrote, "Keep a perspective of what is important in life; monetary things come and go, but people can't be replaced."

Ecclesiastes 9:9 instructs husbands, "Enjoy life with your wife, whom you love, all the days of this meaningless life that God has given you under the sun—all your meaningless days. For this is your lot in life and in your toilsome labor under the sun."

Everything you strive for is meaningless if you don't have time to enjoy your wife. Your wife is a gift from God. Treasure her and enjoy her. Make time today to spend with her because you are not guaranteed tomorrow.

One woman said she treats her spouse in a manner where she wouldn't have any regrets. One man also said, "We only have one shot at life. There is no rewind button."

Don't live a life of regrets. Put your wife and children's needs before money,

success, and anything that is here today and gone tomorrow.

Financial Provider

Putting your wife and children before success doesn't mean you don't provide for them. Everything is about balance. I have known women who felt they had no choice but to provide for their families because their husbands didn't want to work. In those cases, the women felt stressed and burdened as their husbands wouldn't contribute.

Laziness brings on deep sleep, and the shiftless man goes hungry.
—Proverbs 19:15

I also think it's sad when a mother wants to stay home and raise her children and her husband won't allow her to. One woman said one of the things she needs from her husband is the willingness to work at his job to support their family so she can stay at home.

One man talked about working to support his family. He expressed, "I never thought about that as a sacrifice. I always thought about that as a responsibility." It is your responsibility to do what you can to provide for your family.

My husband and I were married for five years before we had our first child. We planned that once we had children I would stay home and take care of them. We were naïve though and never planned financially for it. When our first child was two years old I felt I had no choice but to go back to work.

As we had more children, we didn't try to adjust our spending to prepare for me to stay home. If my husband's hours were cut and we couldn't make our bills, I would just pick up extra days to make up for it. I was only working to stay afloat, not for extra spending money.

After several years, our family started to fall apart. I was miserable at my job. I would cry on the way to work and cry on the way home. I wasn't able to take care of our house and our kids the way I wanted to. I was stressed, depressed, and worn out.

My job was in the evenings so when my husband came home I was out the door. I wasn't able to spend every evening with him and eat dinner as a family. I wasn't able to put my kids to bed every night. I cried out daily for God to help me afford to quit because I didn't see a way out.

In the meantime, God started showing us ways to cut back. Almost monthly God showed us another way to lower our bills. Then, one day, my prayers were answered as my husband's work picked up extra hours. He suggested I take a leave of absence for a few months to see where God would lead us.

I never went back to work. God continued to provide for us by helping us lower our bills and keep us from spending more than I made working. God also opened new doors that wouldn't have been opened if we hadn't taken that step of faith and followed His plan.

One woman explained how she followed God's plan for her family. She had a Bachelor's Degree in Mathematics and a Secondary Education teaching certificate. She had just finished her college degree when she found out she was expecting their first child. She was working on an internship with a big name company and had a great job secured for her. She said, "My husband and I made a difficult decision for me not to work any longer and to stay at home and raise our family. It was hard to do because I had worked hard in college to get good grades and was doing well. But we both felt the Lord wanted me to stay home and raise our children."

The best thing you can do for your wife is allow her to do whatever God calls her to do. By hindering her from following God, you will hurt her and your family. It took several years for my husband to tell me to quit. He didn't force me to work, but he said there was no way we could afford it. At times, I had to fight the urge to resent him. I had to trust God to bring us in agreement.

I did everything in my power to go to work with a good attitude while I waited on God to rescue me. No matter how positive I stayed, I was miserable and my husband knew it. It took God to provide increased hours for him to test to see if it was God's will. If my husband never followed that leading, we would still be struggling financially and I don't believe our marriage would be as strong as it is.

If staying home or cutting back hours is in your wife's heart, trust that God has a plan. If God has a plan, it will benefit you and your family more than what she is doing now. Don't hinder God's plan for her. Pray and seek God for direction.

Helping Hand

Whether your wife works or stays home, you should help by caring for your children and your home. This was on top of the list of women's needs. One woman said that a husband should know everything about his household as should the wife. She stated, "The husband is the head of his household, therefore, he should know how to get the kids up in the morning, get them off to school or teach them at home, clean the home, shop for groceries, balance the checkbook, train/parent the children, help with homework...."

She said husbands are told to love their wives as Christ loves the church, and Christ knows everything about his church and can do it all. She expressed, "Would Christ make his church do things that He Himself would not do? Women are to help their husbands, not rule the house or be a slave to it or the family."

My husband works long hours, so I do the cooking, cleaning, and laundry. Though I do all these things, he knows how to do them as well. He never burdens me by demanding that I do all this. If I don't have laundry done or dinner cooked, he steps in and takes over. I do more because I am at home more. When he is at home, I want to be with him and want him to spend time with our children. I don't want to burden him with household chores.

Everything is about balance. If I feel I am doing everything and unable to keep up, I step aside and let him help out. We have to allow our husbands to help us even if they don't do things our way. We need to communicate as well. There were times when I got mad at my husband for not helping, but he didn't know why. All I had to do was tell him I needed help.

Husbands, work together with your wives to make your home an enjoyable place to live. Include your children in this. When I give my children chores, I tell them we all live here. We all need to help keep our home nice. Talk with your family about what needs to be done each day and be willing to help your wife if she needs it.

We should think about our spouses. I wouldn't like to be gone ten hours a day and have to come home and cook and clean and do laundry. We should think of each other. I look at the housework as making it easier on my husband. When I worked outside the home, I wanted him to make it easier on me by sharing the household chores.

It's all about doing things to help each other out. If your wife needs help,

help her. I tell my husband if everyone would clean up after themselves it would make my life easier. If all you have time to do is clean up after yourself, do that. If you don't normally do dishes, do dishes after dinner, even if you don't feel like it. You can also wash your own clothes. When laundry is piled up my husband washes his clothes to help out.

If your wife is stressed out, offer to do everything on your day off and give her a day out. When my husband notices I'm overwhelmed, he tells me to go out or take a rest, and he takes over. Sometimes that's all your wife needs is a day off. Women, take that break or day off. Let your husband help out, but don't expect perfection.

Teamwork

Marriage is about working together as a team. I learned a great example of teamwork when I played basketball in high school. I especially remember my senior year. We weren't the greatest basketball players, but our team that year was one of the closest teams I had ever played with. We played each game as a team and I believe it was the teamwork that brought us first place in our division that year. I don't remember any strife between our players. We all worked at our positions the best we could. If we saw one of our players struggling in a game, we would willingly step away from our position to help them. That was the reason our team was successful.

Now think of your marriage that way. Communicate with your spouse what your responsibilities are. Then, fulfill your responsibilities the best you can. Be willing to step back, however, and help your spouse when you see they're struggling. One woman said, "I'm quick to jump in and go that extra mile for my husband when he needs it. I want him to always be able to count on me for anything."

Another woman shared, "I perform the tasks that are necessary for the roles I have chosen. It would be chaotic if we couldn't count on each other to do what's needed for our family and our marriage."

One man whose children are grown said he and his wife both worked and had a blended family. "We coordinated with each other three and four times a day," he said, "about who was going to do what and with what child. Getting everyone where they were supposed to be and on time loomed as a constant struggle. Our son played baseball and both girls played softball, sometimes at different fields and times. We had to be at all the games, divide duties and chores and meet out discipline when necessary. For a time we had only one car. We still had to pay bills, clean house, do laundry, cook, go to church, work, and somewhere in there, find time for each other. I still courted my wife, and as a team we had to carry each other's burdens now and again."

Being able to count on each other, helping each other, and carrying each other's load when one is struggling, is what makes a team successful. We also can't have a team without a coach. God should be directing, teaching, and supporting your family. When you work as a team, with God as your coach, your marriage and family will be undefeated.

Support

Teamwork also means supporting each other. Women said they needed their husbands to support them. One area women wrote about was supporting each other in decision making. Supporting our spouses doesn't mean we always have to agree with their decisions.

For years I had a strong desire to adopt a child. My husband, however, did not. I mentioned it occasionally, but his desire didn't change. Then one day as we were talking about it, my husband said if I felt that strongly about it, he would support me. And he encouraged me to look into it.

As I researched adoption, I found in order to afford it the only route we could take was foster parenting. I prayed about it and still had the desire, so my husband agreed to take the classes with me to get certified. After each class, he would tell me he felt more against it. He didn't have peace about taking on that responsibility when we were in a financial bind. Our children were also young and I was working at the time. Regardless of his reluctance, he finished the course with me.

After we finished the course, I saw he still wasn't in agreement with me. So I knew it wasn't God's plan for us at the time. My husband supported me in what I believed was in my heart, and I deeply respected him for that. When my husband wants to do something now I support him even if I don't think it's what he should do. I know if it is not God's will, God will direct him like He did for me.

Support your wife in her decisions. It's okay to tell her you don't agree with her. But if she insists, support her anyway. Pray and trust God to work it out.

Another area where couples fail to support each other is with their children. My husband's way of handling situations with our children isn't always the way I would handle them. There are times when God has me back down and support my husband to show unity in front of our children. If children see one parent not support the other, they see it as an opportunity to take advantage of the parent who easily gives in. My husband and I try to confront each other privately if we think one of us was handling our children wrong.

If you don't support your wife, your children won't listen to her. If you treat your wife poorly and put her down in front of your children, they won't respect her. One man explained how he shows his children that he respects his wife, "By

allowing them to see me treat their mother with love as I prove that I esteem her greatly.”

In the same way you married men should live considerately with [your wives], with an intelligent recognition [of the marriage relation], honoring the woman as [physically] the weaker, but [realizing that you] are joint heirs of the grace (God’s unmerited favor) of life, in order that your prayers may not be hindered and cut off. [Otherwise you cannot pray effectively.]

—1 Peter 3:7, AMP

Don’t let anything hinder your prayers, support and honor your wife.

To Be Desired

Another important need women have is to feel desired by their husbands. My husband makes me feel like I'm the most beautiful woman in the world. Your wife's self-confidence has a lot to do with how she perceives your feelings toward her.

My husband compliments me daily. He gives me the motivation to take care of myself and look my best for him. I love it when he notices what I wear or how I look. This hasn't changed since we started dating. That's how it should be. True love should see beauty not flaws.

Tell your wife she is the most beautiful woman in the world. Compliment her on her outfits. Compliment her on her best features and don't point out her flaws. Continue doing it even if she disagrees, because secretly she loves it. It'll boost her self-esteem and help her feel secure in your marriage.

Knowing my husband thinks the world of me gives me confidence that he is not looking elsewhere. I know I can trust him to be loyal to me because he is crazy about me. Many women said they needed to feel secure in their marriages. They want to feel confident knowing their husbands are content with them.

Women also feel insecure and undesirable when their husbands look at and comment about other women. I get disgusted when I see a man looking at another woman right in front of his wife. Every time I witness that, I pray for God to turn his eyes and heart toward his wife alone.

I had an experience once when I witnessed two older men commenting on a much younger, good looking woman right in front of their wives. Both of the women instantly stopped talking and appeared uncomfortable as they looked away. Imagine how those women felt. How can they possibly feel desirable?

I don't think men realize how they make their wives feel when they look lustfully at other women. Most excuse it as "just a guy thing." To make matters worse, many women don't say anything. I don't know if women ignore it because they think it shouldn't bother them. I know even if a woman doesn't say anything it has to hurt her when her husband shows an attraction to someone other than her.

One woman expressed, "Looking at other women and pornographic pictures, robs a man of his desire for his wife. He looks at those pictures and becomes dissatisfied with what he has at home, because no normal woman can totally

compete with a touched up picture. It causes her to detach from her husband because she knows he doesn't desire her."

When you look at flawless pictures of other women your wife has no way of measuring up to that. Television and the Internet overload us with advertising perfect-looking women. If a husband shows interest in these women, his wife feels it's impossible to be what her husband desires.

If you struggle in this area, you have to get rid of anything that feeds the temptation. Remember to replace wrong thoughts with right ones. Whenever you're out and see a good looking woman and you're tempted to look, turn another way. If you're tempted to turn and look, think of what Proverbs 4:25 says, "Let your eyes look straight ahead, fix your gaze directly before you."

One man said he tries to look in a different direction whenever he sees an attractive woman. He also said if anyone asks him if he thinks another woman is good looking, he normally responds with, "Not as good looking as my wife." He doesn't want to feed anything that could cause him to detach from his wife.

This is how God wants us to be. He wants our desires to be solely for our spouses so nothing can pull our hearts away. You have to keep your eyes and thoughts fixed straight ahead. The more you do it, the less of a struggle it will be. Pray and ask God to help you. He will give you the strength to turn away from temptation.

Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak.

—Matthew 26:41

Honesty and Trust

Honesty and trust also topped the list of what women need. If your attraction and desire is solely for your wife, trust will be there. I trust what I feel is secure in my life. I trust in God because I am confident He loves me. It's the same with my husband. I am secure in our relationship, so I trust him.

I didn't always trust my husband and he didn't always trust me. God had to remove all the factors that caused mistrust in our relationship. It took time but God was faithful to turn our hearts solely toward one another.

God can help you and your spouse regain trust and security in your marriage. Be honest with your wife about everything. As you are honest with her, she will be able to trust you. The more honest you are, the more likely she will be honest with you as well. Show her she can trust you. Give her the security she needs in your marriage. Always be faithful. Don't allow dishonesty to destroy your marriage.

...I will make you my wife forever. I will be honest and faithful to you. I will show you my love and compassion.

—Hosea 2:19, GW

Care and Affection

To help your wife feel secure in your marriage, show her affection. This embellishes her feeling desired. As you show your wife affection, she will feel desired. Women need physical touch as much as men do. By being affectionate and loving to your wife, she will enjoy you more.

When my husband shows me affection and is caring toward me, I feel protected. This is yet another need women wrote about. Women want to feel protected by their husbands.

When my husband's arms embrace me, I feel safe. I think that's why women who didn't have a good father figure when they were young search for that protection in men as they get older. A daughter who has a good father will feel safe and protected. This is how a husband needs to be to his wife, her protector, her comforter, just as our Heavenly Father is to us.

You also should show care and affection toward your children. Women said they needed their husbands to have soft hearts toward their children and to be good fathers. I love the way my husband is with our children. I love that he wants to be with them. I love that he is gentle and kind with them, but at the same time not afraid to be stern. I love that he puts me and our children before anything else. He is never ashamed to back out of his activities to spend time with us.

We love being together, laughing, having fun and creating good memories for our children. I believe when we love and enjoy each other, we positively impact our children. This is the reason I put so much emphasis on marriage in this book. When the marriage is strong, the family will be strong. Don't choose anything in this world over your family. God has given you a precious gift—to enjoy your family. Don't throw it away for anything. Cherish your wife and children. Love them like Jesus loves you. Your family will be truly blessed!

***Children are an inheritance from the LORD. They are a
reward from him.***

—Psalm 127:3, GW

CHAPTER SEVEN

WHAT CHILDREN NEED

Loving Discipline

I

babysat for many disobedient children when I was growing up. As a result, I said I was never going to have children. When I got married things changed. I wanted children, but I was determined to raise them to be obedient. I thought, *“How hard can it be to raise good children? It can’t be that difficult.”*

The first night we came home from the hospital with our first child, she did nothing but scream as my husband and I looked helplessly at each other. As we got through the first few months of no sleep and late night drives over bumpy roads, doing whatever we could think of to keep her happy, I knew raising children was going to be harder than I expected.

As our daughter grew and her personality started developing, she began testing our authority. After several months of kicking and screaming fits when she wouldn’t get her way, I was in tears wondering why this pint sized child had such control over me. My husband and I felt helpless. Others told us not to give in and give her what she demanded, regardless of how many fits she threw. They told us it was a period of testing and she would soon learn. They warned us she would test us many times throughout her life.

As we had more children, I remembered their advice and I was determined not to give in allowing my children to control me. This was the right thing to do. However, I lacked balance between love and discipline. Because I was an emotional mess myself, my children adopted my faults. I would often discipline out of anger, yelling at them for misbehaving, when they were only learning their behaviors from me. I couldn’t expect my children to behave right when I wasn’t behaving right.

As I sought God, He showed me I was the problem, not them. As I allowed God to change me, I went the opposite direction at times, giving them love but no discipline. I felt resentful toward them because they were ruling me. I soon learned there were discipline extremes, and I needed to find balance.

God taught me balance means love and discipline go hand in hand. We can love children in every way but if we don’t teach them there are consequences for their actions, we are as wrong as someone who disciplines and doesn’t love.

One woman explained how her parents raised her in a loving, balanced way:

“They filled our home with love, not things; with wisdom and discipline, not just punishment.”

Discipline is defined as “*training that corrects, molds, or perfects the mental faculties or moral character.*”¹ Punishment is defined as “*suffering, pain, or loss that serves as retribution.*”¹ Discipline is the act of training. Punishment is the result or consequence for doing wrong. If we’re handing out punishments, without disciplining our children in love, they will learn an unhealthy fear of us instead of reverential fear.

When my husband and I discipline our children in love, they often come running into our arms afterwards. This shows they are not afraid of us. In the past when I yelled while punishing my children, they didn’t come running into my arms. I hadn’t included loving discipline. It was just punishment.

We will achieve lasting results by loving and teaching our children instead of scaring them into obedience, as one man expressed, “Being a father of five children, I didn’t want my children to grow up afraid of me like I did my father. My respect for him was born from fear not admiration.”

Punishment may force children to act a certain way, but love and discipline mold them and keep them that way. It’s important to discipline (train) our children when we are punishing them for disobedience. When I punish my four-year-old, I ask him if he knows why I am punishing him. He usually tells me he doesn’t know why. Therefore, I have to tell him why he is being punished.

If I only punished him without showing him the wrong he did, he wouldn’t learn from it. It would only confuse and frustrate him because he wouldn’t know his actions caused his punishment. But when I teach him, after a few times he understands and refrains from doing it again.

God taught me I can still be firm out of love. I learned that screaming and yelling only makes children act out more. It exasperates them because without calmly teaching them to learn from their actions, we’re punishing them and expecting them to work it out on their own.

Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.

—Ephesians 6:4

One woman explained how she lovingly disciplines her children: “I try to discipline them by talking it out rather than yelling. I try to follow through with

discipline so they have consistency and stability in their life. I encourage them verbally when they are discouraged. I try to give them options when facing a difficult situation rather than letting them ‘figure it out’ on their own.”

When we are calm, we can think clearly and discipline accordingly. We can follow God’s leading to teach our children how to avoid making the same choice next time.

My daughter once had to miss an activity she was looking forward to. She complained about it throughout the day. Because of her attitude, we had to take other things away from her. At the end of the day, my husband and I asked her if complaining got her what she wanted. We explained how she lost more by complaining. She learned that complaining doesn’t solve anything, it only makes matters worse.

We didn’t yell at our daughter and leave her to figure it out for herself. But at the same time we were able to stand firm and not give in. We calmly showed her the consequences of her actions. As a result, she was able to learn from our discipline.

Fathers, do not provoke or irritate or fret your children [do not be hard on them or harass them], lest they become discouraged and sullen and morose and feel inferior and frustrated. [Do not break their spirit.]

—Colossians 3:21, AMP

When our children feel they can’t do anything right without getting yelled at, it crushes their spirit and causes them to detach from us. I have found that kids listen less when we yell at them. They close us off and don’t want to hear us, so they don’t listen. If we constantly yell at our children, we will frustrate them and take the joy out of their childhood.

Tough Love

One man said that he allows his kids to make mistakes and encourages them to learn from their mistakes. He also said, “I deeply encourage my kids to be kids, the girls to be girls and the boys to be boys.”

My husband was at a park once when he witnessed a mother yelling at her children for every little thing. He said they were the most miserable looking kids he had ever seen. When they started to run, the mother yelled that the park wasn't a place to run. When they went down the slide they had to put their stoppers on. Their stoppers were their feet pressed up against the slide. My husband said the kids went down the slides slowly with dull expressions on their faces.

These poor children were prevented from being able to have fun and enjoy themselves. We have to allow our kids to be kids. We can't prevent everything. We will drive ourselves and our children crazy. We have to allow them to fall sometimes. This woman wasn't protecting her children, she was destroying them. Let your children learn some things by trial and error, especially on minimal things like sliding down a slide and running in a park.

One woman shared what she needed from her parents growing up: “Respect and loose enough reins so that I make mistakes while I'm young. It's better to learn lessons young rather than make larger mistakes as an adult.” She also said her mother did everything for her, sheltering her and trying to keep her innocent. She expressed, “When I got out on my own, I went wild and made many mistakes that could have been avoided had I been parented instead of served.”

This doesn't mean we allow our children to do whatever they want. They need boundaries and consequences if they step over those boundaries. However, the boundaries don't have to smother our children so they can't move without setting off an alarm.

I have a friend with a nineteen-year-old daughter and she said she started by giving her small boundaries. When her daughter was faithful with those boundaries, she stretched them a little more. As she stayed within those boundaries, she gained her parent's trust so they could keep stretching her boundaries. Now the girl is a trustworthy young adult.

The purpose of discipline is to teach our children that their actions cause consequences, good or bad. We can't show our children everything. Sometimes

we have to allow them to see that the good choices they make will reap good consequences, and the bad choices they make will reap bad consequences. This is how God works with us. I have had to go through many things to open my eyes, even though others warned me. I didn't see them until I physically endured them.

As much as we want to protect our children from everything, sometimes we have to let them see for themselves.

One woman shared how her father used tough love on her growing up. She said he pushed her to a higher standard for her own good, especially when she didn't want to be pushed. "That big meanie," she said. "You're in your twenties before you understand how this was good for you."

Tough love even applies if you have grown children out of your house. My husband and I wouldn't have learned how to live within our means, and rely on God, if our parents bailed us out financially. When we give our children everything they want, we hurt them and don't give them what they need.

A hot-tempered man must pay the penalty; if you rescue him, you will have to do it again.

—Proverbs 19:19

This verse could be the same for anything our children continue to do wrong. If they never have to suffer the consequences for their actions because we are always there to rescue them, they will never learn. They will keep doing the same things over again.

Responsibility

One woman explained that she tries to instill in her children, “Responsibility for their actions despite another person’s behavior or misbehavior.”

Our children need to learn responsibility. If we always bail them out of their troubles, why would they look to God when they have us working everything out for them? See how this could hurt our children more than allowing them to reap the consequences? They could possibly deny Christ because they see no need for Him.

I remember hearing a preacher once say that we are raising someone who is going to spend eternity somewhere. This is a huge responsibility and should be our number one priority raising our children. Nothing else matters in this life if you don’t have Jesus.

Discipline your son, for in that there is hope; do not be a willing party to his death.

—Proverbs 19:18

I don’t want to be the one standing in God’s way of reaching anyone, especially my children. Proverbs 13:24 says, “He who spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is careful to discipline him.”

If we love our children we will discipline them. Proverbs 23:13-14 reads, “Do not withhold discipline from a child; if you punish him with the rod, he will not die. Punish him with the rod and save his soul from death.”

Discipline is necessary. We need to do what is right and best for our children no matter how hard it is. Every time we teach our children God’s way, we plant another good seed in them. When we plant good seeds in their lives, we will see them produce a good harvest. Good seeds produce good fruit. Bad seeds produce bad fruit. It’s that simple. With every choice we make raising our children we should always think...*am I planting a good seed or a bad seed?*

The rod of correction imparts wisdom, but a child left to himself disgraces his mother. Discipline your son, and he will give you peace; he will bring delight to your soul.

—Proverbs 29:15, 17

We will be able to enjoy our children like God wants us to when we are consistent with our disciplining. We enjoy our children when they are not walking all over us and being rebellious.

Rebellious children don't respect authority. There is no excuse for children to control their parents. If we don't teach our children to respect our authority, they will have a hard time respecting other authority figures. They will also have a hard time submitting to God's authority.

One summer, my family and I were leaving a fair. We witnessed several young men yelling obscenities at police officers. The officers were blocking traffic to allow pedestrians to cross the road. The boys didn't like being held up in traffic. I was shocked the officers didn't do anything about it. I was even more shocked that the boys would fight with officers who had authority to throw them in jail. We need to teach our children to respect authority by first teaching them to respect us.

Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord.

—Colossians 3:20

Teach your children that when they are obedient to you, they are obedient to God. Praise them when they listen to you and tell them how God is pleased with them. This will motivate them to want to do what's right.

Threatening our children with God is the wrong approach. Being harsh and saying "God's going to be mad at you" is only going to make our children pull away from God and us. We should tell our children that God wants to help them do what is right. We can't behave without God's help, so what makes us think our children can.

When my children regularly do something wrong, I pray with them and ask God to help them. God is full of mercy toward us. We should be the same toward our children. Instead of getting mad at them, we can help them work with God to change their behavior.

Don't Give In

We can be merciful and at the same time firm. We especially need to stand

firm when we're tempted to give in. I have learned it's harder to give in and do nothing than it is to stand firm and do the right thing. Taking the easy way always ends up being the harder way.

One of my sons slept in our bedroom for a while. I thought it was easier to let him stay in our room, rather than listening to him cry in his room. However, it was the opposite. It was a hassle. I knew I needed to stick with it and do what needed to be done. The first few nights were difficult, but each night became easier until he stopped crying and was content in his room. I endured one week of misery rather than months, or years, if I had let him stay in our room longer.

It's the same when our children test us. It's hard to stand firm and be consistent with our discipline. But the good fruit it produces in them makes standing firm worth it. My husband and I have learned the more we give in, the more our children misbehave. We have also learned the more we stay consistent while they are younger, the easier it will be as they get older. But no matter what age your children are, you can start now showing consistent discipline.

Consistency is the key. I struggled in this area as well. I would often make empty threats and not follow them through. God taught me to think before I discipline and not take something away from them that I'm not able to follow through with. When I'm inconsistent with my children, they pick up on it. They push harder to see how far I'll bend. Kids are smart. When they see an opening they run right to it.

God has also been teaching me not to ignore misbehavior. I have learned that ignoring little things turns into bigger things, which become harder to control. If we ignore our children's wrong doings, we are ignoring our responsibility as parents and hoping for good results.

It doesn't work that way. It will not work itself out on its own. Children need to be trained and guided. A child is born selfish. My baby is twenty months old. If I have something he wants, and I don't give it to him, he throws his standard kicking and screaming fit. But if I give him what he wants, he's happy. We as parents have to teach our children they can't have everything they want.

Proverbs 22:15 says, "Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline will drive it far from him." If we don't teach our children, they will grow up bigger babies and become a lot harder to teach.

It's the same for us. If we don't allow God to train and teach us, we will never grow up in Christ. We will continue to throw fits and complain whenever we don't get our way. We are a lot harder to teach once we get older. That's why it's best to teach a child right from the start. As adults we often refuse correction

because we think we know everything. But children are easier to train. They tend to believe whatever we tell them.

Jesus said to humble ourselves like a child, and unless we change and become like children, we will never enter the Kingdom of Heaven (Matthew 18:3-4). The Amplified version for this verse says to be like a child is to be trusting, lowly, loving, and forgiving. Our children will trust and follow what we say if we guide them properly.

Unconditional Love

Do you feel like you spend the majority of your time disciplining your children? Do you feel like you are in battle constantly? Proverbs 17:6 says, “Children’s children are a crown to the aged, and parents are the pride of their children.”

My Bible commentary says parents and children are not meant to be adversaries, but allies in life who are proud of each other. When we feel like our children are our enemies, we may find we are getting out of balance in love and discipline. That is when we should focus on loving our children more. Love is important and should be our priority.

And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

—1 Corinthians 13:13

Love covers all the mistakes we make as parents. First Peter 4:8 says, “Love covers a multitude of sins [forgives and disregards the offenses of others]” (AMP). Since children are lowly, loving, and forgiving, we don’t have to beat ourselves up over mistakes we make. By loving them now we make up for all the mistakes we have made. Even if your children are grown, you can still choose to cover your mistakes with love.

Unconditional love was the number one thing men and women growing up said they needed from their parents. They wanted their parents not only to show them love, but to say, “I love you.” One man said he needed his parents to tell him they loved him and that he was good at what he did.

Sometimes when our children are being rebellious, and discipline doesn’t work, God shows us they need more love and attention. I am not an affectionate person. It is hard sometimes for me to show affection. But I know it’s important for my children. I don’t want them to grow up having a hard time being affectionate. So I make an effort to show them love and affection, whether it’s uncomfortable for me or not.

I want to bathe my children in love. I don’t want them to ever question my love for them. One woman explained what she gives her child that she lacked

growing up, “So many ‘I love you’s he can’t stand it, and hugs for no reason. My child is loved and he knows it.”

We also need to tell our children often that God loves them. One woman shared how she and her husband contribute to the success of their children. She expressed, “I give them all of me. We show them how much God loves them.”

We show our children how much God loves them by showing His love through us. If they don’t see God loving us and working through us, they will have a hard time accepting His love. When our children know God loves them, it gives them the confidence they need to stand against the obstacles they face in life.

One woman explained how she contributes to the success of her children: “I am devoted to making sure they grow up happy and confident and go out into the world and affect it in a positive way.”

Our children will have a positive impact on the world when they know they are loved. When they know God loves them, they won’t need to search for fulfillment in destructive things. Ultimately, showering children with love creates happy children. Responding to children with anger and hate creates unhappy children.

I don’t think most of us mean to be harsh to our children. In my experience, I was harsh to my children because I was dealing with problems of my own. When we are unhappy, have marriage problems, or feel out of control, we tend to take it out on those we do have control over. We can inadvertently make our kids repay us for our hurt. This can be dangerous and destructive to our children. They are innocent and all they want is for us to love and nurture them.

We should think of them. How would we feel if we were our children? How would we feel if we took the blame for things we had no control over? This is why I put so much emphasis in this book on allowing God to work in us. If we are unhappy, our children reap the consequences of our unhappiness. When we are miserable, we are more likely to snap and punish instead of direct and train. The more I allow God to work in me, the more my family benefits. The more I allow God to train and teach me, the more equipped I am to train and teach my children.

I encourage you to allow God to work in you. He wants to help you. He was and is the only One who could help me. I have more pressure now that I have four children; but I also have more self-control now than I had when I only had one or two children. I homeschool so my children are with me all day. Between trying to teach my ten, six, and four-year-olds, and having a screaming baby

tornado storming through the house, some days it's hard not to lose it.

God has taught me to enjoy my children, instead of thinking I can't wait until they are grown and out of the house. Many things happen each day I could get upset about. I don't want to waste time I could be enjoying them by getting frustrated about things I have no control over and can't change. I know I'll laugh about it someday so I might as well laugh about it now.

Isaiah 33:6 says that God is our constant source of stability (NET). By God working in me, I am finally showing my children stability. They don't need to wonder how mom will act from one day to the next.

Philippians 4:13 says, "I have strength for all things in Christ Who empowers me [I am ready for anything and equal to anything through Him Who infuses inner strength into me; I am self-sufficient in Christ's sufficiency]" (AMP).

We can be content knowing Christ has given us everything we need to show stability in everything we do.

Relationship With Jesus

Even though we have everything we need to remain stable, there are going to be times when we will fall short. Instead of trying to be a perfect parent, we can introduce our children to THE Perfect Parent—God. One father expressed, “I try to give my kids the security of knowing their Heavenly Father and His care where mine falls short.” Another man said he allows his kids to see him as human and capable of mistakes.

We should allow our children to see that we make mistakes just like they do. One woman expressed, “I try to admit my faults so they know that I recognize my imperfections.” I also admit my faults to my children. I try to teach them that, even though I am not perfect and don’t do everything right, God is perfect and He will always treat them right.

I also encourage my kids to turn to God and pray for me when I falter. My daughter has mentioned she’s prayed for me when I wasn’t acting right. I pray when someone is treating me wrong, and God always comes through for me. I want to teach my children to rely on God to vindicate them as well.

Children don’t hold grudges like adults. When we apologize they quickly forgive us. When we continually treat a child poorly, and never admit we are wrong, negative, defeated emotions continue building and affecting their behavior.

When we apologize, and make an honest effort to change our behavior (repent), there won’t be a buildup of negative, defeated emotions in our children. Instead, we can teach them we all make mistakes. We can show them how to work with God who teaches us through our mistakes. They can learn through our example to rely on God.

In my survey, many said they needed their parents to teach them how to develop a relationship with Jesus. One woman stated, “Without a doubt, the absolute key to raising good, morally healthy children is to teach them to love the Lord with all their heart and to understand what Jesus has done for them!”

Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your

children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.

—Deuteronomy 6:5-9

As you love God with all your heart, soul, and strength, impress His love on your children. Include God in everything you do throughout your day. You will find many opportunities to talk about Him as you keep your mind focused on Him. I try to acknowledge God in front of my children, whether praying to Him, praising Him, or talking about what pleases Him. We should teach our children God wants to be involved in every area of our lives. He cares about all that concerns us.

We also need to tell our children God has a plan for their lives. God has given them special gifts (talents) to do what He calls them to do. This will give our children the confidence they need when they face the world on their own. They will know to go right to God who will direct and prepare them for His plan.

This will also keep us from pushing our children to do what we think they should do. We may want our children to go to college, but that may not be where God wants them to go. If we control their future, we will hinder God's plan and waste time and money. On the other hand, we may be against them going to college when God is calling them to go to college.

I tried every job imaginable when I was younger. Had I originally gone to God for His plan, I would have saved a great amount of time and money. We should teach our children to rely on God for everything, and follow Him. Only in His will are we truly satisfied and fulfilled in our lives. Be sensitive to God's leading and allow your children to follow His plan for their lives.

Godly Example

Train up a child in the way he should go [and in keeping with his individual gift or bent], and when he is old he will not depart from it.

—Proverbs 22:6, AMP

Training our children in the way they should go seems to be an overwhelming task. Yet I have learned it doesn't have to be. I strongly believe that we train our children by how we live our lives. When we love God and follow Him daily, our children will benefit. Our lives have the greatest impact on our children. They follow what they see in us—the good and the bad.

We have to ask ourselves, do our children see us practicing what we preach? Are we the same at home as we are in front of those we want to impress? Do our children see us being kind, loving, and merciful to others, but act the opposite way at home? I believe this is the main reason so many high school graduates fall away from the church. Parents are not being godly examples at home.

As I was once asking God to show me how I could help and bless others, I felt Him tell me to bless my children. Whenever I heard a preacher preach on being a blessing to others, and giving ourselves to serve others, and building others up, I didn't relate it to my children. God showed me that the home is where it starts. Why would God want me to serve Him in ministry helping others when I was not ministering to my family? One of the qualifications for ministry is to treat and manage our families well.

He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect. (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?)

—1 Timothy 3:4-5

Paul was speaking about the overseer of a church. However, I believe it applies to anyone in Christ. God will not call us to step out in ministry without first teaching us how to treat and manage our families. Some Christians ignore this to step out and serve, but they hurt their families in the process.

When we are in ministry helping others, we feel good about ourselves. It's humbling, however, when you are called to bless and serve your children. And I don't mean in the literal sense. No one praises you for being a blessing to your children, because your children most likely won't realize it until they are grown.

When asked if there was anything missing from childhood that people gave their children, one woman replied, "My parents were awesome! I want to be just like them!" That is what I want every one of my children to say when they are grown.

Many of those surveyed said they needed their parents to model a relationship with Christ. When we consistently live our lives for Christ, our children will likely follow. If they do end up rebellious and choose not to follow Christ, at least we have done what we could to show them the way. They will have that foundation to come back to when they find out the world's way doesn't work. They will see by our lives that Jesus is the only way.

If your children are grown and you haven't allowed God to work in you, you can start right now. You can be a witness to them. They will see the changes God brings about in your life as you follow Jesus with an undivided heart. It is never too late for God to turn things around in your family. He is more than able.

Accountability

Another thing we teach our children by our example is reverence for God. Our children need to know they are held accountable before God. When we are not with our children, they will know that God still sees everything. This will help them avoid some of the pitfalls kids fall into once they are on their own.

When I was still at home, my parents held me accountable. I knew I had to respect their authority, otherwise I would suffer consequences. I longed to be out on my own because I thought I wouldn't have to be accountable to anyone. Naturally, I did whatever I wanted when I got out on my own. I learned the hard way that everything I wanted wasn't necessarily good for me.

When I asked leaders in the church why so many kids drift from the church once they are out on their own, one leader responded, "I think in some cases it can be that they have been under their parent's control by guiding them in spiritual matters and making them go to church, camps, retreats, *etc.* When they get on their own, they want to see what the 'world' has to offer because it seems so exciting and cool. But they soon find out what price they pay for the sin in their lives and eventually return to their faith, if their faith was real to begin with."

It is important that we don't emphasize our kids participate in church and church activities over a personal daily relationship with God. We need to make sure we are not leaving the church responsible for training and teaching our children. The church is with our children a small portion of the time. They are meant to validate and support what we should be teaching by example at home. We are with our children the majority of the time. We are their biggest influences.

Christian Friends

Even though we are responsible for training our children, regularly assembling with other believers is still important. We need to be around other believers to grow with each other as Hebrews 10:25 confirms, “Not forsaking or neglecting to assemble together [as believers], as is the habit of some people, but admonishing (warning, urging, and encouraging) one another, and all the more faithfully as you see the day approaching” (AMP).

Our children especially need to be around other children who have the same faith. One man said, “We are a Christian family that believes in the importance of being part of a network of other believers in many aspects of our lives. Being involved in a church and activities with other Christians gives us the opportunity to see our kids model themselves after both us and others who live moral lives.”

My children’s closest friends are ones they met through church or other Christian activities. It’s important to find a church that preaches the truth from the Bible and stresses a relationship with Jesus. I grew up in a religion that did not teach a daily relationship with Jesus. Naturally, the children I met there had the same morals as the rest of the world. There was no difference.

We have to lay religion aside and follow God where His truth is taught. Ask God to show you where to go. He will lead you where He is glorified.

Whatever I command you, be watchful to do it; you shall not add to it or diminish it.

—Deuteronomy 12:32, AMP

Just because we are around other believers doesn’t mean every child is a good influence. My children are young enough for me to introduce friends to them whose parents I see display good fruit in their lives. If I see the parents having fruit as a result of their relationship with Jesus, I know their children will benefit. Therefore, I know my children will benefit as well.

This doesn’t mean we have to alienate our children from every child whose parents don’t follow Christ. Our children can be a light to other children. But we have to keep a close eye and yield to warning signs showing us when other kids are having a negative influence on our children. First Corinthians 15:33 says,

“Do not be misled: ‘Bad company corrupts good character.’” All the effort we put into our children to help build good character can be swept away by bad influences.

I believe all children need at least one close friend of the same faith as an accountability partner to help them avoid following the world’s path. My fifteen-year-old niece and her friend were recently showing off their purity rings they received from their parents. When your child has others who share the same values, they will feel more confident in keeping those values because they know they are not alone.

Sure Foundation

Being around other believers is important. However, if we only make our kids go to church, and don't teach them the main reason for church, which is a daily relationship with Jesus, then we are not giving them the foundation they need. We are still relying on the hope that they'll pick it up on their own.

One woman who works with high school students in the church said, "I think that even though these kids are going to church, they still aren't making their faith their own. I see at our church that many kids are going because their parents make them and there are fun events to attend with their friends. I think another huge factor is that parents are not being the spiritual parents that they should be at home. Instead, they are letting the church teach their kids. They need much more at home. Families aren't reading and discussing God and Jesus and praying together. It is so important to teach and show your children how to have a personal relationship with Christ and hope that they desire that relationship as well. Kids need that personal relationship with God established before they are in the world on their own."

At one point I overloaded my daughter with Christian activities. She became frustrated as I pushed her to keep up with memorizing her verses for the classes. I wasn't teaching her to focus on the meanings. I only wanted her to memorize the verses to keep up. I felt convicted and realized she should enjoy learning about God. I should be teaching her to think about the verses, pray about them, and apply them to her life. I shouldn't pressure her to memorize them.

Whatever we push on our children and force them to do, they seem to rebel against it. I want to introduce Jesus to my children, not force Him on them. I want them to make the choice to follow Jesus based on seeing God work in our lives.

My children already see God working in our family. My kids ask me questions all the time about God. My husband has gotten up for work to see my oldest son sitting on the couch reading his Bible. I have walked into my daughter's bedroom and found her reading her Bible, because she wanted to learn more about God.

My daughter goes out of her way to think of others by giving something away or doing something nice for someone. She tells me what she talks to God about and how she prays to Him. When she is struggling with something, she

asks for His help. When she loses something, she asks God to help her find it. When something happens she praises Him. There have been times when we are doing something and I tell her that we should ask God and she tells me she already did.

I am confident my daughter will not turn away when she gets older because she's already found that relationship with her Creator. She is growing with God as her foundation. She knows she can come to Him with everything. She's already learned at a young age that even when my husband and I let her down, and are not behaving right, she can always count on God. Because my daughter sees God working in our lives, she wants to follow Him.

My three sons are still young. However, my six and four-year-olds have caring hearts and talk about how much they love God. My six-year-old recently told me he was praising God as he asked Him to help him find his toy. I pray all my children follow the same path as long as we continue to put God first.

I never want to pressure my children to turn to God. I want to encourage and lead them through the way I live my life. I don't want to push religion over a relationship with God. Religion is often what pushes people away, as I have witnessed in my life. However, having a relationship with Jesus doesn't fail. Once you have that relationship with God, and know you can rely on Him for everything, I don't see how you can deny Him.

Salvation

Whether or not their children will accept or reject Christ is probably one of Christian parents' greatest fears. Once you know the truth, it's hard to watch those you love deny the truth. One woman shared, "My ex-husband is not a believer, and my first three children seem to take his beliefs. I struggle with trying to get them to understand my faith."

We have an important responsibility to lead our children by living our lives for Christ, teaching them the whole truth of Jesus, and not hindering them by living hypocritical lives. But ultimately, they have to make that choice for themselves. We can't make it for them.

If our children refuse to accept Christ, there are some things we can do to help them. As I was praying about an unsaved loved one recently, I came across 2 Corinthians 4:3-4: "And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God."

I asked God how I could reach this person when these verses say that Satan blinds the unbeliever's mind. God led me to the following verse:

For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.

—2 Corinthians 4:6

Christ's light penetrates through all darkness. Satan doesn't have any authority. He uses deception to convince people to close their minds to the truth. But, like John 8:32 says, the truth is what sets us free. Therefore, I felt God tell me to stand up against Satan and pray for God to unveil this person's mind as I share with them the truth about Jesus, and the truth about Satan as well.

This person didn't know they were being blinded until I told them they had an enemy who was deceiving them. In this case, this person accepted the truth. Praise God! But you may not always get a positive response. Once people know the truth, they can keep rejecting the truth. But you can keep praying for God to

continue sending His Word through every means available; television, radio, and other believers. Meanwhile, you can be unceasing in your prayer praising Jesus that He will do everything He can to reach their hearts.

As in this person's case the truth is all they needed to hear. Tell your children the truth and tell others the truth. You don't have to keep jamming it down their throats, but you can pray for an open door to share the truth, and pray they clearly see the truth. If they reject it, continue praying. I had many seeds planted by many different people through my life before I was ready to see the truth. In the meantime, don't worry. Trust that God will do everything He can to make Himself known to your children.

Stop Worrying

We can drive ourselves and our children crazy if we worry whether or not they'll choose the right path. I battled with this once. I went through a time filled with fear, judging the slightest things my kids did, worrying they wouldn't turn out the way I wanted them to. I took it into my hands by trying to make them act a certain way. As a result, they started acting out more. I was trying to create perfect children, which was impossible to do. I proved it by creating the opposite.

One woman said she gives her children space to grow into their own people instead of little programmed robots. I wasn't giving my children any space to be themselves. I was too worried about them turning out bad that I wanted to control them. I wanted to make them into what I thought they should be. God revealed this to me through a dream one night.

In the dream, I was in a pool with all my children. The water was deep and my children kept falling under. I frantically ran from one child to the next, pulling them out from under the water. When I would pull one child up, the others would go under. I would run back and forth doing the same thing over and over, filled with fear.

Suddenly, the whole pool was empty. I remember feeling a sigh of relief in the dream as I thought, *"Why was I worrying about my children drowning when God could come in and remove the water?"* I woke up that night with the realization that God is in control. I knew I needed to stop worrying if I was doing everything right for my children. Worrying about everything I do or don't do, and everything they do or don't do, keeps me from enjoying them.

I am determined to trust God with my children. I am determined to trust that He will remove all that threatens them. I can do my best and not sit on the side lines and watch them struggle. But I don't need to worry about them drowning in what I have no control over. God is always faithful to guard what we commit to Him, especially our children.

...and I am [positively] persuaded that He is able to guard and keep that which has been entrusted to me and which I have committed [to Him] until that day.

A couple years ago, God proved to me He was faithful to guard my children. At the time, my husband and I were frustrated by our oldest son's constant misbehavior. I felt overwhelmed as these thoughts were taking root in my mind that he had some disorder that we couldn't control. God told me not to accept those thoughts. He was working on my son. And nothing was wrong with him.

At a family party one day, my son was misbehaving horribly. My husband and I came home that evening feeling defeated. We felt we had no control. The next morning, my son came running out of his room to tell my husband to wait a minute before he left for work. He said he wanted to give his daddy a hug and tell him he loved him. That was what we needed to stop worrying and trust God to work in our son.

Since that time, my son's behavior has improved tremendously. He is a loving child with a great personality. It was a time of testing that we needed to stand firm and commit him to God.

We tend to worry about everything our children do wrong and everything we do wrong, Satan uses our worry to make us think we've blown it. Instead, we can lean on God to show us what we can do, and trust Him to do what we can't do.

I felt God tell me recently that He loves my children more than I do. If God loves our children more than we do, He is going to do everything in His power to help them. God is in control. We can stop worrying and start enjoying our children instead of trying to make them into what we think they need to be.

Build Them Up

If we want to motivate our children to follow our teachings, we have to focus on treating them well. One issue many in the survey talked about was the importance of building our children up. One man explained what he chose to give to his children that he lacked growing up: “Building self-esteem is the item. Yes there is great joy in seeing a child feel like they can accomplish anything they set out to do by removing the fear of low self-esteem.”

One woman shared what she needed from her parents growing up was “To be told I was good. When you’re never told you are good you wonder if you’re bad.”

Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and they who indulge in it shall eat the fruit of it [for death or life].

—Proverbs 18:21, AMP

Will we speak death or life over our children? Will we build our kids up with edifying words, or tear them down with hurtful words? Calling our children names is harmful. Telling them they are no good is like a punch in the stomach, it hurts deeply. You can see it instantly crush their spirit. Words spoken over our children can have a tremendous effect on their lives.

The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell.

—James 3:6

Words are powerful. When I was in middle school a girl walked up to me and told me I was ugly. Those words destroyed my self-confidence for years. Later on, hearing positive words about me boosted my self-confidence and healed me from that wound.

We can also fix any harsh words we have said to our children by building them up with words of affirmation. One man said he felt insecurity was the cause of most problems in children today. I believe that affirmation and verbal

encouragement need to be given to our children more than discipline. In fact, the more I build my children up, the better they behave and the less we have to discipline them.

When my youngest child was born, my four-year-old acted roughly with him. He did it enough that we had to discipline him constantly. As I prayed about it, God told me to find something to praise him for. The more I praised him, the better he behaved toward his brother.

One woman explained how she affirms her children: “I try to affirm them verbally and with physical touch (e.g. hugs, high fives, kisses, back rubs, etc.).” We can find many ways to affirm our children and build them up.

Encouraging our children when they mess up is a way to build them up. If they are failing in a class at school, we can encourage them to do their best instead of pressuring them to do better. Instead of getting mad and frustrated with them, we can talk about why they are struggling, and find the proper help.

I like to encourage my children to keep pressing on and to not give up, no matter how hard it gets. This starts even when they are young, riding a bike, learning to read, or playing a sport. Acknowledging their achievements and growth from their hard work and perseverance gives them confidence they need to persevere in life.

We should magnify our children’s strengths and talents, rather than their weaknesses. Parents often compare their children to siblings or other children. Instead, we should focus on the good in each of our children. God made us unique and perfect in our own special way. We should praise our children for just being them.

It’s important to encourage our children to be the best they can be, and not measure themselves against others. This applies to us as well. We shouldn’t compare ourselves to other parents. We should focus on being the best we can be, no matter what anyone else thinks.

I think people are hard on parents. We are quick to judge each other with the attitude...*If that was my child, I would....* Parenting is the hardest job in the world. You never know what to expect until you go through it. We should encourage parents, not discourage them. We should encourage ourselves and our children too. It’ll motivate each of us to do our best.

Another way we encourage and affirm our children is by praising them to others. One woman said she needed her mother to remember situations when she was proud of her. And she needed her mother to tell someone else about those moments. Another woman said she needed her parents to cheer for her, to

motivate her, and to express pride in her accomplishments.

When I played basketball in high school, I made the local newspaper several times for the number of baskets and rebounds I made in a game. I loved it when my dad brought the articles to work and showed off my achievements to his co-workers. It made me feel good that I made my dad proud. I now try to praise my children in front of others to show I'm proud of them. They beam with joyful pride when we affirm and praise them. They love seeing how proud we are of them.

Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as
in fact you are doing.

—1 Thessalonians 5:11

Open Line of Communication

Many people surveyed said they needed their parents to listen to them. One man said, “I have tried to affirm my girls, listen to them, and hear their hearts, and they seem to be better for it than I was.”

I struggle with this area because I’m a workaholic. I get focused on providing for my children that I often don’t stop to listen to them. My kids talk to me all at once. Some days it overwhelms me and makes it hard to listen. But I know it’s important to listen to them, and it makes them feel important. I have also noticed if I don’t stop and listen when they have something to say, they don’t listen when I speak to them.

As we listen to our children, they’ll be more open to communicating with us. I want to establish this line of communication with my kids when they are young, so they know they can always come to me. I know as children get older they are less likely to communicate their feelings. They won’t communicate with us if we never listen to them, and yell at them every time they mess up.

One woman shared what she chose to give to her children that she lacked growing up. She said keeping an open mind when discussing anything with her child is what she did differently. She said it has made a big difference. She explained, “My child confides in me more than I ever did with my parents. We also have a respectful relationship, not one of turmoil.”

By keeping an open mind with our children, it encourages them to tell us things without fear of getting in trouble. Our children need to know they can come to us even when they make wrong choices. When they do come to us with their mistakes, we need to show them mercy. We can still discipline them for their wrong choices while being merciful. They need to know we are there to help them learn from their mistakes, just as God is for us.

One woman said she listens to her children and tries not to be judgmental. Another stated, “I try to understand them more before I judge and they seem to be enjoying life and I think they want to do things with me and be around me.” Our children will enjoy being around us when they are confident we love them unconditionally. They will enjoy us when they know they can come running into our open arms, regardless of their mistakes.

Another reason we should listen to our children is because God will often reveal warning signs to us through them. If we never listen to them, and get to

know them, we'll often miss these signs.

One year my daughter attended a week long summer Bible camp. A girl in her group made rude comments to her throughout the week. The following year my daughter did not want to attend this camp, but she wouldn't tell me why. She finally told me, but it had been a year since the incident. It made me aware that I needed to spend more time listening to and talking with my children.

As I talked to my daughter, I told her about some times in school when others teased me and made fun of me. It gave me an opportunity to teach her to pray for the little girl and ask God to work in her heart. I was also able to teach her when someone is mean to her; they may be hurting. I explained to her that her parents may be rude to her and she may be learning her rudeness from them.

Since that incident, I have been trying to sit and talk with my children and take notice when they look bothered by something. I want my children to know they can tell me anything. I don't ever want them to be afraid to talk to me. One woman said she was afraid to tell her mother things. She said her mother often accused her of things she never did. This made her hesitant to share anything with her mother.

I don't want my kids to think I'm unapproachable. I want to show them compassion like God shows us. I want them to know I am there to help and encourage them. All the characteristics God shows us are the same ones we should show our children.

We should also take time to listen to our children's interests and struggles, even if they don't seem important to us. One woman explained it perfectly, "We have always respected the fact that whatever our children are going through is a big deal for them even if it is silly to us. They are people and deserve respect."

I'm not particularly interested in talking about toys all day, but to my children it's important. God's helping me to stop what I'm doing and show them I'm interested in what they have to say. Thinking from our children's perspective will help us relate to their interests and be compassionate with their struggles.

My children and I met some friends of ours at a pool once. My daughter wasn't a good swimmer at the time, so I brought a pair of floaties for her so she could swim in the deep end. When we got to the pool, I saw my daughter hiding the floaties behind her back in embarrassment. I started to tell her to wear them, that it wasn't a big deal, when I felt God tell me it was a big deal to her. I quickly hid them away and didn't make her wear them.

What seems small to us can be huge to them. We were their age at one time. We can't forget that.

Investing Our Time

Developing an open line of communication with our children goes with developing a relationship with them. We develop a relationship by spending time with them. I think too often we forget that parenting is a selfless responsibility. It's about investing our lives into the lives of our children. We can often become consumed with our own needs to the neglect of our children's needs.

I don't think some parents realize how their decisions affect their children. The rise in children in full-time daycares, and raised by other caregivers, supports some of this truth. I know there are many who are in situations where they have to work long hours. But there are some parents who choose career advancements and personal agendas over their children's needs.

In my survey, many who have a happy family said they gave up career advancements, jobs and hours at work, to spend time raising their children. One woman said she sacrificed a career that she loved and was making rapid advancements. Another woman said, "I risked career advancement by working part time (although I wouldn't trade it for anything). I lived in a smaller home to accommodate for less pay due to part time." Another said her children are first in her thoughts when any decision has to be made.

I talked to a man recently who felt our generation of parents is self-centered. He said he thought we are too focused on having our "me" time, we are pawning off our responsibility on other people to raise our children.

When we have children, it's not about us anymore. It's about ALL of us, the whole family, what benefits all of us. If we pawn off our parental responsibilities on others, to focus on our own pursuits, we can't expect it not to affect our children.

If caregivers are with our children more than we are, how can that be good for them? We can't form a close bond with someone we rarely spend time with. We should make every effort to spend as much time as possible with our children. If we want our children to model our example, we have to be there to be an example. They won't learn from us if we are rarely with them.

Many wrote that personal sacrifice was one of the things they needed as a child from their parents. One woman said, "We have made many sacrifices to be this involved with our children. But that's why we had them, to spend time with them because they grow up so fast."

If you have to be away from your children for long periods of time, make sure the time you spend with them is quality time. Quality is more important than quantity. Don't come home from work and tell your children you are too tired to spend time with them. They have missed you all day. They need your time and attention.

We don't even have to be away from our children to neglect spending time with them. We can be around our children 24/7 and still neglect spending time with them. We can get engrossed in caring for our children's physical needs and neglect developing a relationship with them. One woman said, "I still wish I could forget the housework sometimes and focus on the kids instead."

I feel the same way. Each day I have specific things I want to accomplish. I am driven to get things done. Then, at the end of the day I can check them off my mental list. I often care for my children the same way. There are times at the end of the day when I can check off that the kids ate, took baths, cleaned their rooms, finished their homework, *etc.* Then, the Holy Spirit humbles me and reminds me that I didn't spend any quality time with them. I have to purposely take those moments and stop what I am doing to spend time developing a relationship with them.

One woman shared how she invests time in her relationship with her children. "I always have and will continue to put my children before everything except God," she said. "My entire day, every day, is spent trying to be the best mother possible for my kids. I try to meet all needs...emotional, physical, mental, and spiritual. They are my life."

I don't want to meet just my children's physical needs. I want to build a solid relationship with them. One man explained why he invested time to develop his relationship with his children: "My parents were uninvolved emotionally and did not invest any time in our relationship. Other than dinner, family time was basically non-existent (few vacations, sporting events, *etc.*). As a result, I became very attached to my dad's parents. I have chosen to reverse all of those parental failings and raise my children where love is spelled T-I-M-E."

Another man shared what he chose to give to his children that he lacked growing up: "One on one, and as a family, quality time together. My children are loving, caring, and show far more affection than I did at their age. They love spending time together as a family...even my thirteen-year-old."

Individual Attention

It's important to spend time as a family, but our children need one-on-one time as well. One-on-one time helps form a special bond between you and your children. One-on-one time enables you to focus on only them for that time. With four children fighting for my attention, my children need one-on-one time with me and my husband.

Many said when they were growing up they needed one-on-one time with their mothers and their fathers. Women said they needed one-on-one time with their mothers for girl talk and motherly advice. One woman said, "We learn from our mothers what it means to be a woman, mother, sister, daughter, wife, *etc.* Mothers should be loving, nurturing, and encouraging."

Many women also said they needed their mothers to teach them morals. This is why the one-on-one, mother daughter time is important. If you are not talking with your daughter and teaching her the things she needs to know as she grows up, she will seek to learn from other sources. I would prefer my daughter to hear about it from me. I want her to learn the right things from me, not the wrong things from the world.

Women also said they needed one-on-one time with their fathers, as one woman explained, "Fun, daddy-daughter moments, things we only share and not the other siblings." Another shared what she needed from her father was "For him to make me feel special (his little girl)."

Dads have a tremendous impact on their daughters. It's important that you make one-on-one time with your daughters a priority as much as you do with your sons. One woman explained how daughters learn from their fathers by "Learning how we want to be respected by men through the example of the way he treats you. His approval of things you do with your life and just being around and involved in your life."

My husband is an excellent father. He makes it a priority to find time to talk one-on-one with his little girl. He tells her how proud he is of her and how much he loves her. He sometimes takes her out bike riding, just the two of them, and often lets her stay up late with him to spend time with her separate from her brothers. He has often surprised her by bringing her flowers or a gift. He wants to shower her with love and attention so she doesn't need to search for it in anyone else. He wants to show her the respect she deserves so she can look for

those same qualities when she is ready to choose a husband.

My husband also makes it a priority to spend one-on-one time with his boys as well. My boys love their daddy. They want to be like him. That's how it should be. Boys look up to their fathers. Fathers have a tremendous influence on their sons. They need that quality, one-on-one, man time together.

One man said he needed his father to spend quality time with him and teach him about life as a man. Another said he needed his father's wisdom and experience, to say he's been there before. Boys need to be taught how to grow into manhood, what to look for in their future wives, why to save themselves for marriage. All those things should be taught by you the parent. If they don't learn these things from you, they will learn them from the world.

One man said his dad never talked about sex, he only handed him a book on the birds and the bees and that was it. Again, we need to avoid pawning our parental responsibilities off on others. Parents are often embarrassed to talk about sex, so they don't talk about it at all. This is why the one-on-one time is important. This helps you develop a deeper bond with your children to prepare you for these talks.

Men also said they needed one-on-one time with their mothers growing up. Moms have a great impact on their sons as well as fathers. A loving mother can teach her sons what to look for in a woman. More likely a man who has a loving mother will look for those same qualities in a wife. A loving mother will often produce a future loving husband, whereas a man who doesn't respect his mother will often disrespect other women.

Many men said they needed their moms to cheer and encourage them. Being your son's cheerleader will mean the world to him. One man shared what his mother failed to give him growing up was "Support! I was always in sports & Mom just dropped me off, never watched a game and cheered me." Our sons need our support. It is important to be there for them, cheering and encouraging them through life.

It's important to make spending time with each of our children a priority. It doesn't always have to be a planned outing. It's about giving our children undivided attention. There are times when I will take one child with me to run errands and joke around and have fun with them. There are times when I will let one child stay up late with me. There are times when I will lay in their bed with them and read a book and talk to them. It is a daily effort to take time out of our day, when those opportunities come, to give our full, undivided attention to our children.

It's also important that our hearts are in it and we're not going through the motions. We can spend quality time with our children, but they can tell when our hearts are not in it. One woman said, "My father gave us kids ample quality time but my mother either didn't or complained when she did. One thing that we do in my family now is do things together instead of just one parent doing things with the kids."

We don't even have to complain for our children to see we don't want to be with them. Our attitude will say it. For example, my children love to play board games with us. I don't particularly like playing kid's games, but I like to be with my children doing what they enjoy. Because we have a baby and a toddler, playing games isn't always easy. We used to have a set day of every week when we would have family game night. There were times when that night came around and one of us was tired and didn't feel like playing board games.

If we forced ourselves to play a game with them, when we didn't want to, our children noticed we weren't enjoying our time with them. So now we may play games with them once a week. But it doesn't always have to be a set day and time. We don't have to be legalistic about our time with our children. We can make an effort to spend time with them, not force ourselves to.

Focus on the Good

Many times our negative attitude is a result of our perspective. If we change our perspective, the way we think, we can change our attitude. There are times when I'll have a negative attitude about something, but then someone will point out a different perspective. If I think on that, it instantly humbles me and changes my attitude.

I think one of the reasons we have a hard time enjoying our children is because we focus on their faults. Just like our spouses, we see only the negative in them if that's all we focus on. There were times when I felt guilty for thinking I didn't like my children. I realized the common denominator was that I was focusing only on the negative.

Our thoughts play a major role in our attitude. Satan wants us to focus on the wrong in our children to pull our hearts away from them. The solution may be that they need more attention, or more love. Or they may be dealing with something that is hurting. If we focus on the negative and have an angry attitude toward our children, we will only feed the problem and push them further away.

I like to think from the perspective that someone is watching me. How would I see myself from the outside? Thinking this way often reveals my errors. I also often weigh other people's advice. Many times we don't see something that is obvious to everyone else.

Listen to advice and accept instruction, and in the end you will be wise.

—Proverbs 19:20

Whenever someone points out something about us, our natural response is to defend ourselves. However, God tells us to listen to advice. God often speaks to us through other people. We can even miss things in our own children that are obvious to others. We can miss warning signs God will use other people to show us when we have ignored His warnings.

If we never listen to advice, we'll often miss out on solutions to the problems we have been praying about. Proverbs 13:10 says, "Pride only breeds quarrels, but wisdom is found in those who take advice." And Proverbs 11:2

reads, “When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with humility comes wisdom.”

Of course, as with anything, there can be deception. Proverbs 12:5-6 says, “The plans of the righteous are just, but the advice of the wicked is deceitful. The words of the wicked lie in wait for blood, but the speech of the upright rescues them.” We should weigh advice and pray about it to make sure what we are hearing is coming from God.

I often take advice and think about it and ask God to show me if it is something I should accept. Most times it is something God has already tried to tell me, but I refused to listen. When someone points it out, I know right away it’s coming from God. I have accepted a lot of advice from other parents that I use on my own children. One woman explained how she contributes to the success of her family. She simply wrote, “Asking others how they do it?”

Raising our children doesn’t have to be hard. We can enjoy each day as we stay focused on God and accept His guidance. God wants us to enjoy our children. Psalm 127:3 says, “Sons are a heritage from the LORD, children a reward from him.” Our children are meant to be a blessing for us to enjoy. They are not meant to be a burden. We are also meant to be a blessing for them to enjoy, not a burden.

It’s our choice. We can enjoy raising our children and have a positive impact on them, and generations to come. Or we can be miserable while raising our children, and have a negative impact on them. Either way, we still have to raise our children, so we might as well enjoy the journey and not hurt our children in the process.

Enjoying life is a choice. I choose to enjoy my husband even when he doesn’t meet all my needs. I choose to enjoy my children even when they are not behaving the way I want them to. I choose to enjoy my life and trust God even when I am not seeing any results. Choose today to enjoy your family!

CONCLUSION

I

f you have never accepted Jesus as your savior, would you ask Him to come into your heart today? Jesus said to Martha in John 11:25-26, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?” “Yes, Lord,” she told him, “I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world.”

No matter where you are in your walk with God, I pray you will commit your whole heart to Him today. Psalm 37:5 says, “Commit your way to the Lord [roll and repose each care of your load on Him]; trust (lean on, rely on, and be confident) also in Him and He will bring it to pass” (AMP).

Hand God all your cares and spend time getting to know Him. Everything else will fall into place by His mighty hand. Don’t beat yourself up if you feel you are not doing anything right in your marriage or raising your children. The Apostle Paul shared how he hadn’t arrived where he wanted to be:

Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

—Philippians 3:12-14

God wants to work with you right where you are. It’s about taking one step at a time with God. As you put Him first place in your life, He will truly give you the desires of your heart. Put God first and I guarantee the transformation He will bring about in your life, your marriage, and your family will amaze you. Remember, God has a great plan for you and your family, don’t let Satan steal it from you. It’s already yours through Jesus. Take hold of it and enjoy the family God has given you!

NOTE FROM AUTHOR

I

would like to share how *You Can Have a Happy Family* came to fruition. In April of 2009, I was leading Bible studies in my home when I felt a strong leading to attend a one-day publishing class taught by a local author. I thought about writing a book someday, five or ten years down the road, so I thought the class would be helpful.

When I came home that evening I packed the information away and asked God to let me know when He was ready for me to write. I never imagined I would wake up the next morning with the title of the book and the chapters strong on my heart.

Writing about marriage never crossed my mind before, so I knew God was speaking to me. I was scared since I didn't have the qualifications to write and teach on such an important subject. But God encouraged me not to worry. He would provide everything I needed. He led me to Hebrews 10:35-36 and told me to get started and never give up.

I admit this journey hasn't been easy. In fact, writing this book was the hardest thing I've ever had to do. God was faithful, though. He kept His promise. He sent people along the way to teach me and help me with everything I needed. I am grateful for all the willing hearts God used to help produce this book.

I am also grateful for the wonderful friends I made along the way. God used them to encourage me and pray for me every step of the way. Satan tried to take me down and stop this book more times than I can recount. But he didn't succeed because He Who is in me is greater than he who is in the world (1 John 4:4)!

My marriage has been tried harder than ever during this journey. A month before *You Can Have a Happy Family's* release my husband told me he wanted our marriage back to the way it was before the book.

That hit me like a ton of bricks. I was ready to walk away from writing. I cried out to God not knowing what to do. I couldn't write a book to help save people's marriages, and in the process lose my marriage.

God was faithful. That same day He opened our eyes and showed us that

Satan was trying to stop this book from coming out. That gave us the determination we needed to stand together against him and not allow him to succeed in destroying our marriage and this book.

I pray this story is an encouragement to you to keep fighting the good fight of faith. God is always faithful. He will always be fighting for you and your family. Always remember that Satan can't succeed in destroying our families unless we allow him to. Stand firm in your faith in Christ and take a stand for your family!

May God richly bless your family,

Amanda Beth

You can find more teachings on marriage at Amanda's website (www.amandabeth.net). You can also follow Amanda's blog (www.sharingtruths.com) every Monday as she shares the reasons and benefits behind the Truths in God's Word.

Mail: Amanda Beth
P.O. Box 183796
Shelby Township, MI 48318

Email: authoramandabeth@gmail.com
Twitter: www.twitter.com/abdaubs
LinkedIn: www.linkedin.com/in/authoramandabeth
Facebook: www.facebook.com/author.amandabeth

ENDNOTES

INTRODUCTION

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CHAPTER SEVEN

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