

BEYOND *Vows*

THE KEYS TO A LASTING RELATIONSHIP



PASTOR JAMES GREER
WWW.JAMESWGREER.COM





I want to first thank Debbie my wife for her unbelievable understanding, love and support for all these years. You are my best friend and lover and if I had to do it all to do over... Yes I would do it all over and try to appreciate you more and sooner.

Proverbs 18:22 (NKJV) He who finds a wife finds a good thing, And obtains favor from the LORD.

He who finds a good wife finds a good thing and obtains favor from the Lord! I want to most of all thank the Lord for my wife. I also want to thank Josh Poe, Joy Thornton, Susan Goutreaux, Darrell Ingram, and Pat Scott for all your help and work on the devotion.

Love is not so much a *duty*, but a *delight*, It's not so much a feeling, as a fact, it's a decision that leads to the right actions over and over until the feelings come. Love is the right decision put into action over and over again that will then lead to the right feelings. You can't feel your way into love, but you can act your way into love.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Expectations - the Cause of Offense	5
Wrong Expectations Chart	11
Chapter 2: Equity Helps Determine Destiny	17
Chapter 3: Communication - 50 Years and Counting . . .	25
5 R's of Communication	27
Love Does Not Always Produce Joy	28
5 Keys to Better Communicate	31
HD Listening	34
6 Ways to Communicate Love	35
Basic Needs of Men & Women	37
Chapter 4: Conflict Can Turn Into Blessing	41
Chapter 5: The Secret Truth About All Problems	51
Chapter 6: Secrets to 50 Years and Counting	63
Chapter 7: Myths About Marriage	75
Chapter 8: Sowing & Reaping of Marriage	83
Chapter 9: How to Get Back on Track	93
Chapter 10: Knowing God's Purpose for Marriage	101
Chapter 11: Cure vs. Conflict	109
Chapter 12: Myths About Marriage	115
Chapter 13: Love the Season	121



CHAPTER 1

Expectations - The #1 Cause of Offense

When writing about wrong expectations being one of the #1 causes of offense, conflict, problems, etc... I almost started laughing to myself. What my expectations are now and what they were in my previous 50 + years are unbelievable. If only we could learn this early in life.

The truth is, in the beginning we both have unrealistic expectations for and of the other person. Yes, many times we do not talk about them, or even when we do we do not listen with our heads, but with our, let's say, heart. Our emotions of what we believe are going to be like in our mind, despite what the other person said or counselor/pastor says.

I believed that when I got home from work every day the house would be clean (most of the time it was), meals cooked (most of the time they were), and sex every day and night (sometimes it was) -- I'm just not going to let you know everything! My wife thought I was going to be so loving, kind, caring, and listening, and that I was going to want to hug and kiss and would care more about that than sex.

I would call during the day and tell her how much I missed her (I call her almost every day) and couldn't wait until I got home when we could talk and share. (Not sure that's what I wanted) I loved those years but that's not exactly what happened. The truth is the fewer expectations and the more love in action, the better. I'm not saying we should not expect what we have talked about and agreed on. I'm saying the focus should be on what we have in common, not what we disagree on. I'm not saying I did that; I'm saying we should do that.

We had lots in common or we would not have married. But, if we are not careful, the devil, the world, and the way it is will cause us to begin to focus on what we don't agree on, instead of what we did, do, and will agree on. We will begin to focus on what we don't have and, sometimes, what others have instead of all God has given us and all we do have.

1 John 4:18 (NKJV) *"There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love."*

We fear and fight instead of looking for love and understanding. In the next few pages, you will get many examples and lessons on how to handle wrong expectations better, but remember the Bible is, and always will be the best counselor.

Psalms 62:5 (KJV)

"My soul, wait thou only upon God; for my expectation is from him."

The only person whose expectations will never disappoint you is God. Free insight - your mate is not God, and neither are you!

Philippians 1:20 (ESV) *"As it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death."*

What if our expectation and hope were to please God and release the pressure from our mate?

1 Peter 1:3-4 (NLT2) *"All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is by his great mercy that we have been born again because God raised Jesus Christ from the dead. Now we live with great expectations, and we have a priceless inheritance—an inheritance that is kept in heaven for you, pure and undefiled, beyond the reach of change and decay."*

If our great expectation was the priceless inheritance we keep and get in heaven, what goes on here on earth is not nearly as

important and worth fighting so much about. Remember this is not your long-range home or mate.

Less expectations the better!
The clearer communications the better!

Wrong Expectations lead to offense, anger, and even bitterness if not dealt with. What is a wrong expectation?

The difference between perception and reality:

*I expected you to be home at 6:00 p.m.
and you got home at 8:00 p.m.*

Why did that get you so upset and offended? Because you did not communicate the difference between perception and reality. The greater the difference between the perception and reality, the greater the offense.

*I expected you to be home at 6:00 p.m. and
you really did not get home until 11:00 p.m.*

The offense is greater because of the time between the expected time and the actual time. This is one of the major causes of all offenses in relationships. These can be relationships in marriage, with parents, or friends, or with children.

Wrong Expectations are the #1 cause of all offenses in relationships. Another reason wrong expectations causes such great problems and offenses is because of lack of communication.

For Example:

Years ago I was coming home early and going to surprise my wife Debbie, I perceived she was going to meet me at the door with hugs and kisses. Being so excited to see me, we would

have an early dinner etc... the rest is none of your business... lol... The reality was when I walked in the house the first thing she did is ask if I would go to the store and get some MILK... MILK I thought... I slammed the door and almost spun out of the driveway, she must have thought I was crazy, because I was.

As I was driving to the store, I started thinking, “Why am I so mad?” When the truth is that I did not even tell her I was coming home, much less what I was expecting. It was my lack of communicating the truth that caused me to get offended and angry.

Danger:

The real danger of being offended by wrong expectations when it is not dealt with correctly and quickly is that it can lead to a clouded view of that person. You will get angry easier at that person, and worse bitterness can creep in.

Cure:

When we are offended we have to learn to be quick to repent or forgive. If we did the offending, be quick to ask that person to forgive us. If that person asked us to forgive them, be quick to forgive them. If they don't ask, still be quick to forgive them.

Acts 24:16 (NKJV) *“This being so, I myself always strive to have a conscience without offense toward God and men.” You have done all you can to ask forgiveness from those you offended or even might have offended, and have forgiven any and all that have offended you.*

Psalms 119:165 (KJV)

“Great peace have they which love thy law: and nothing shall offend them.”

Great peace comes as a result of having no offenses.

Acts 3:19 (NKJV) *“Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord...”*

If you did the offending, ask forgiveness, and repent. You will receive a great time of refreshing from the presence of the Lord. It did not say the one offended will always forgive you, but it does say that if we will obey God, He will give us that great time of refreshing.

Refreshing - Recovery - Revival

The first example of someone getting offended (Genesis 3:1-19)

God had a plan for marriage and created them both in His image. God wanted what was best for both of them and Satan had a plan to destroy them.

John 10:10 (NKJV)

“The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.”

God had a plan to destroy Satan. Satan's plan was to get the woman offended at God. (Thinking God was holding out on her) Once she got offended, her view of God was clouded.

REMEMBER

Love always provides and protects.

Adam & Eve used fig leaves to cover up- they tried to fix it themselves. Adam blamed the circumstances and Eve tried to play the victim card. From that time on men and women have been getting offended and blaming each other for the problems they are having instead of quickly asking and giving forgiveness.

Satan is a liar and has come to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. Remember, when you get offended by wrong expectations, Satan can use that. Jesus came that they may have life more abundantly. We can have an abundant life by allowing the truth to set us free.

Quick Review:

1. Wrong expectations are the difference between perception and reality: What area can you work on that will help you be less offended? (Mate, children, friends, work, hobby, etc.)

Notes: _____

2. Once we are offended it often clouds our view of that person. Is there someone you have allowed the offense to cloud your view of that person?

Notes: _____

3. The best way to handle being offended is to forgive. Is there someone you need to forgive or ask forgiveness from?

Notes: _____

4. Communication is really one of the main causes of wrong or unmet expectations. What area can you better communicate that would help have less unmet expectations?

Notes: _____

Wrong Expectations Chart

Can You Define Your Expectations of Your Mate, Friend, or Future Mate? Chart: This is a simple exercise for anyone in a relationship that wants to reduce wrong expectation or communicate better expectations between each other.

Household	His	Hers	Both
Dishes			
Trash			
Yard			
Animals			
Children			
Cooking			
Other			

If you answer both please define your part

Family Commitment	His	Hers	Both
Who bathes the children?			
How much free time away from family?			
How often should we miss church?			
Who should discipline the children?			
How should we discipline the children?			
How often should we go out together?			

Family Commitment	His	Hers	Both
What time should we try to eat supper?			
What should we do on the weekends?			
Other			

Finances	His	Hers	Both
Who should pay the bills?			
We should never buy over _____ without talking to my mate.			
Do we have a good budget?			
Do we tithe?			
Do we have more debt than we should?			
How can we begin to get out of debt?			
How do you think we got into debt?			

Sex	His	Hers	Both
How often do you feel we should have sex?			

CHAPTER 1

DISCUSSION GUIDE

#1 - Can you recall a time when a difference between your expectations and reality caused offense or conflict in a relationship? How did it affect your feelings toward the other person?

Notes: _____

#2 - The chapter suggests that wrong expectations often stem from a lack of communication. How can individuals improve their communication to align expectations more closely with reality in various relationships?

Notes: _____

#3 - Discuss the concept of forgiveness in the context of handling offenses due to wrong expectations. Why is it important to be quick to forgive or seek forgiveness even when it's not explicitly asked for?

Notes: _____

#4 - Drawing from the biblical examples mentioned, how did wrong expectations lead to larger conflicts or misunderstandings? What lessons can we learn from these examples to better manage expectations in our relationships?

Notes: _____

#5 - Reflecting on the quick review questions in the chapter, what practical steps can individuals take to minimize wrong expectations and improve communication in different areas of their lives, such as with family, friends, or colleagues?

Notes: _____





CHAPTER 2

Equity Helps Determine Destiny

I love writing about equity in relationships 50 years later. While the truth is during our first few years I did not even know what that was. Fifty years ago, I thought equity meant go to work bring your check home, pay the bills, and then go to church. Then the next week do it all over again.

I mean what else could you want, I was not running around, not gambling, drinking (much), etc... I believe if I worked hard and sometimes long, long hours, paid the bills, and then came home that was all the equity I needed.

I was so dumb I did not know my wife wanted things like time, attention, and love without sex (whoever hears of that), and listening without talking and answering. But the truth is, she loved me and showed grace. Many times she would tell others I'm glad I have a husband who will work and come home while many wives' husbands either won't work or won't come home, so I'm blessed.

You're not trying to build equity just to get what you want, you're trying to build equity because you love them and want a strong and loving relationship.

All relationships will have hard times, and all relationships will have hard times if you do not hear what I am saying, but when you have equity in that relationship it sure makes getting through those hard times easier on you both.

Equity is also not one-sided. Both should do all they can to build equity in the relationship because none of us are nearly as good as we think we are.

Remember we most often see ourselves as we want to be while others see us as we are. As you read the chapter on how *equity* helps determine our *destiny*, ask God how you can add equity to your relationship and don't focus on your mate giving you equity.

Equity with Integrity =
Healthy, Wealthy, & Lengthy Relationship!

Psalms 33:5 (NET Bible) *The Lord promotes equity and justice; the Lord's faithfulness extends throughout the earth*

Psalm 89:14 (NET Bible) *Equity and justice are the foundation of your throne. Loyal love and faithfulness characterize your rule*

If you don't have equity you don't have clarity. Without equity there is no remedy. Equity is what you have deposited into a bank or build-up in your house. More importantly, here it's what equity you have deposited in the other person's life with whom you are in a relationship.

Many people in relationships try to withdraw equity from the other person without ever depositing or building equity in the other person's life.

Example:

If you put \$1000.00 in your bank account you have \$1000.00 equity or \$1000.00 you can withdraw before you begin to overdraft. When you begin to overdraft, it will cost you. And if you keep doing it the bank might even close out your account or break off the relationship you have with the bank.

The same is true in many relationships. One person keeps trying to withdraw from the other person without making deposits or building equity in that person's life. After a while it begins to take a toll on that person, and they will begin to

withdraw because it drains them. If this does not change, many times they will even break off the relationship.

You can allow your children, job, or even your hobby to drain you, but that's your choice. You have the choice to change that.

But in a relationship, both need to intentionally add equity to the other person's life regularly before withdrawing. Sometimes things come up and you have to withdraw all your equity at once. Just make sure when those times come, you put equity back into that person's life as soon as possible. Do not act like you did not withdraw it all or forget you withdrew it all. It's best to add it back and then some!!

Example:

I recently went out of town for a week with 3 other guys. Two of those guys still had several young kids at home that their wives had to take care of totally while we were all out of town. Even though a few days were business, it was nothing compared to staying home taking care of children by themselves, and missing their husbands.

When those guys got home they had used up all their equity and needed to start building some back and then some... Knowing these guys they did!

How do you build up equity?

- Take the spouse out to eat without the kids.
- Help with the kids and give the mother a break.
- Plan a weekend getaway.
- Tell her how much you love and appreciate her.
- Fill her car up with gas if you're not already doing that.
- Send flowers.
- You get the idea...

Wives, if you need to know how to build up equity in your husband's life its easy...

Remember all men have big egos!

- Brag on him. Tell him how proud you are of him.
 - Tell him how good-looking he is.
 - Simply have sex with him. Men think that's the cure-all.
- They are not really very smart.

The point is to become aware of not always trying to draw out equity without first putting it in. This applies mainly to day-to-day living. If we are not careful, life can become very routine and without meaning to you begin to take each other for granted. Your mate, next to God, is the most important thing in your life. Treat them like it. Look for ways to do something special for the other person that builds equity, not because you want something back but just because you love them and want to give to them.

1 John 4:7-8 (NKJV) *"Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love."*

Yes, love is giving, but to enjoy that love it's learned and earned. By nature, we are all selfish. But when we are right spiritually, we are not. True love wants to give or build equity in the other person's life.

God wants us to love each other, but He also makes it clear that true and lasting love only comes from God. To know God, we have to know Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior. If you don't know Jesus and you want to know Him as your Savior, you can have this kind of love and share this kind of love.

Two ways to do that today:



1. Scan this QR Code

2. You can simply admit you have sinned, because we all have. Understand sin separates us from God. You don't want to be separated. Believe Jesus died on the cross and rose for your sins. Pray and invite Jesus into your heart:

Dear Jesus, Forgive me of my sins. I want you to be the Lord of my life. I believe you died for my sins and rose from the grave. Come into my heart and save me.

Jesus said if you call upon Him or pray as you did, He will save you.

- **Romans 10:13** (NKJV) *For “whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved.”*
- **Romans 3:23** (NKJV) *“for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”*
- **Romans 6:23** (NKJV) *“For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*
- **Romans 10:9-13** (NKJV) *“That if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. For the Scripture says, “Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame.” For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him. For “whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved.”*

Quick Review:

What is Equity?

How can you build equity in the other person's life?

Why do we need God's love to build equity?

Discussion Guide

#1 - How would you define “equity” in the context of relationships based on the chapter’s explanation? How does the concept of equity differ from mere transactions or exchanges?

Notes: _____

#2 - Discuss instances where one might attempt to withdraw equity from a relationship without depositing or building equity. How can this imbalance impact the dynamics between partners?

Notes: _____

#3 - The chapter provides examples of ways to build equity in relationships. Share personal experiences or suggestions on how individuals can intentionally deposit equity into their partner’s life on a regular basis.

Notes: _____

#4 - In what ways does the imbalance of equity affect relationships over time? How important is it to maintain a balance between withdrawals and deposits of equity to sustain healthy relationships?

Notes: _____

#5 - Considering the spiritual aspect discussed in the chapter, how does God's love contribute to the building of equity in relationships? How does understanding and applying God's love enhance the process of depositing equity into someone else's life?

Notes: _____





CHAPTER 3

Communication 50 Years and Counting

The truth about communication is that I have written a lot of information about communication and better ways to communicate. But the truth is reading all this might not change your life, but love, humility, applying, and wanting to have oneness over winning, will change your life and communication skills.

The truth is many times I don't apply what I write like I should. Many times, it is much easier to teach and preach than apply.

But one thing is for sure I love my wife more than anything in the world next to Jesus Christ, even after 50 years, and when things are not right with us, things in life just don't seem right.

That's what it means when two become one, when one is hurt or is upset so is the other one. It is hard to stay mad very long because it hurts me almost as bad or more than it hurts her, and it should.

One of the real problems I see today is what so many couples call LOVE. They want love to be some kind of ongoing tingling, emotional feeling. Don't get me wrong, if you are still in the dating stage and you don't have some of those feelings, there is something wrong also.

Yet, the truth is, true Biblical lasting love is more an action than a feeling and emotion. I do believe if you continue the right love actions repeated over a long period of time, emotions and feelings will come.

1 Corinthians 13:4-8 (NCV) *“Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous, it does not brag, and it is not proud. Love is not rude, is not selfish, and does not get upset with others. Love does not count up wrongs that have been done. Love is not happy with evil but is happy with the truth. Love patiently accepts all things. It always trusts, always hopes, and always remains strong. Love never ends.”*

If this is true Biblical love, and it is, I can tell you I don't always feel like being patient, kind, not bragging, and not being proud. Yes, sometimes I'm rude; yes, sometimes I'm selfish; yes, sometimes I get upset (let's say there are times I get upset), and I'm not as patient as I should be. But, one thing is for sure My Love Never Ends!

Not only does Love Never End, I never want it to. So, what I need to do is learn God's Word is true not me, and when I'm wrong learn to admit it. In the following chapters, I will give you many tools to help you communicate better, but there is no better tool than the Bible.

If you wanted to, you could both agree that when you get upset, you are going to admit the Bible is right and whatever it says you will both agree on it! Your marriage and life would be so much better.

Let me give you a few verses on how to be happy.

- **Matthew 5:5** (TEV) *“Happy are those who are humble.”*
- **Matthew 5:9** (TEV) *“Happy are those who work for peace.”*
- **Psalms 144:15** (NKJV) *“Happy are the people whose God is the LORD!”*
- **Psalms 40:4** (NCV) *“Happy is the person who trusts the LORD.”*

The 5 R's of Communication

One of my greatest problems with communicating is not talking, it's listening... this list is the R's of communicating through listening!

#1 - First step of listening is to Release. Release what you think you know. Release your assumptions. Release the stress of the day. Release your need to be right. (I really have a problem with the need to be right)

#2 - The second step of listening is to Receive. Receiving means you open your heart. You feel the words. Remember, you listen with your ears but you hear with your heart. If your heart isn't open, you won't hear a thing.

Proverbs 4:23 (KJV) *"Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life."*

Most problems are really heart problems. What is the real issue? It's not money, your job, your mate, or your children. It's the heart!

#3 - The third step of listening is Repeat. This is where you use your own words to repeat back what your partner, friend, boss, etc. said to you. It helps the other person feel heard. It shows you've been paying attention. So, repeat it back to them what you think you heard.

#4 - The fourth step to listening is to Respond. This is where you get to talk and respond to what you heard. But make sure that the other person is actually done talking before responding. You may want to ask them if there's anything else.

#5 - The fifth step of listening is to Repent. This is where you simply apologize if you misunderstood what the other person said or thought. You don't do this just to do it, you do

it because you really feel it after you stopped long enough to listen. **Acts 3:19** (NKJV) *“Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord.”*

Sometimes the best thing about learning to listen the right way is the repenting and refreshing that comes at the end. Many times, it brings a refreshing new relationship with the other person and God.

Love Does Not Always Produce Joy

We all know people we love but don't really enjoy being around. We all need to learn how to communicate better.

Marriage = Relationship Communication

When I say marriage here, it applies to all relationships. I believe most couples love each other – even those having lots and lots of problems. They love each other, but the problem is they cannot communicate it to each other.

Love does not produce joy. Only when love is communicated correctly and received correctly by both people can it produce joy. If joy isn't produced, they don't talk the same language...

FREE INSIGHT:

Most marriage & relationship problems
are communication problems.

1 Corinthians 13:1-3 (NKJV) *“Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, –(But I cannot communicate love by the words I speak) I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, (preach and teach) and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, (great intellectual abilities)and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, –(But I cannot communicate love) I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, –(But I can't communicate love or I love you) it profits me nothing.”*

The problem is you can be in love and not have JOY – because the truth is when love is communicated and received, it produces LOVE & JOY.

1 Corinthians 14:7-11 (NIV) *“Even in the case of lifeless things that make sounds, such as the flute or harp, how will anyone know what tune is being played unless there is a distinction in the notes?”*

When someone plays an instrument, it does not mean you can understand what they are playing. It does not mean you enjoy the sound. It is only when certain tunes are played that you can understand it and enjoy it.

1 Corinthians 14:8, NIV *“Again, if the trumpet does not sound a clear call, who will get ready for battle?”*

Some trumpets sound for battle, some for retreat, some call to worship, ect.. If you do not understand what each sound means to you, what was meant to help, it can really hurt. Many times, what one mate says they mean something to help but it hurts instead.

1 Corinthians 14:9, NIV *“So it is with you. Unless you speak intelligible words with your tongue, how will anyone know what you are saying? You will just be speaking into the air.”*

If you cannot communicate your love in words your mate cannot understand. It is like speaking to the air. Have you ever felt like you were trying to talk to your mate about something and it was like speaking to the air?

1 Corinthians 14:10, NIV *“Undoubtedly there are all sorts of languages in the world, yet none of them is without meaning. If then I do not grasp the meaning of what someone is saying, I am a foreigner to the speaker, and he is a foreigner to me.”*

If you were talking to someone who did not speak English, saying “I want you to know I love you”, but they looked at you like they did not understand, you would then speak louder.

They still do not understand you, so you get all upset and say and do things because that person did not respond to your telling them you loved them.

This happens to couples all the time. I know that Paul was talking about speaking in tongues- If we can't understand what the person is saying, what good is it? Only when love is communicated does it produce joy! It's not so much that we know that you love me, etc. ... as it is what can I communicate. Love does not produce joy, love communicated produces joy.

Galatians 5:22-23 (NIV) *"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law."*

Lack of love, joy, and peace is a spiritual problem. The problem is communicating that love. Example: We have always known God loved us, but we never really enjoyed and understood that love until God communicated it through the death of His Son Jesus Christ. Once God communicated His love through the death of His Son, you understood it. Then it is just a matter if you want to accept it and enjoy it.



5 Keys to Better Communicate

How - When - Why - Where & Who

#1 - Learn How to communicate better. We will talk more about that later.

#2 - Learn When to communicate. When I say when, we are always talking, but we are not always communicating. I was out to eat at a very nice restaurant with my wife and without knowing it I kept looking at my phone and she said, “Are you on a date with me or your phone?” I said, “Sorry you’re right. Let’s both stay off our phones and talk.” It was the right time to communicate.

Some couples who are very busy need to plan times when they will talk about the most important issues and let it all out at that time, but not every day. This is a time just to be honest about how you feel, and the other person just has to listen. You might think something is true, but it is to the other person.

This is the you “get to let it all out” and that person has to listen. You then have to set a time you both are going to let it go and move on. Sometimes it’s not the right time. When I am studying in the morning, unless it’s an emergency, is not the right time. If my wife is busy cooking and dealing with other issues, it might not be the right time to communicate unless I want to help cook.

3. Learn the WHY of communication. “Why” is what you are trying to communicate that is important to you. Many times, we never stop long enough to communicate the “why”. We simply get upset because someone doesn’t understand us or doesn’t support us but, without telling, explaining, or communicating the why, the other person might not understand that it is important to you or why you are upset.

4. Learn the Where of communication: Some things need to only be communicated in private. Example: How we are going to discipline the children, etc. Some things need to be communicated only in the bedroom, and I'm not going to explain that. Some things might need to be communicated in front of the family where everyone has some input. Some things do not need to be communicated in front of parents, but some things do. Some things do not need to be communicated in front of other couples or other people. I think you get the idea about *where* to communicate.

5. Learn Who to communicate to. Some things should only be communicated with your mate if you're married. Some things should only be communicated with your most trusted and closest friend. Warning: friends of change, so be very careful what you share and with whom you communicate. Some things should only be communicated between you and God.

Psalms 27:10 (TLB) *"For if my father and mother should abandon me, you would welcome and comfort me."*

Sometimes you need a professional to communicate with. Warning: Be very careful who, where, and when you communicate personal and private things. I hope this helps you with the How, When, Why, Where, and Who of communication. But better yet, I hope you will apply it and try it.

Communication is More than Words

When we are communicating without clarity, there will be carelessness. With clarity there will be completeness. When there is clarity, but things are not complete, there will be consequences and problems. Many times, what we call a problem results when one or the other does not make it clear, or the other did not complete what they agreed to do.

Communication that brings joy takes two, both receiving, completing, agreeing and doing. Communication that brings joy is much like love. It is more than an emotion, it is an action. The action is communicated by showing we care. As in the old saying, "People do not care how much you know until they know how much you care".

Also, people do not care how much you communicate until they know by your actions how much you really care. In other words, do your actions match your words over a long period of time?

Right communication + the right actions over a long period of time = trust and credibility

Right communication + the right action by both over a long period of time = Joy!



HD LISTENING

Most couples do not have a talking problem, they have a listening problem. Let's unpack the 4 steps of Hi Def listening.

Step #1: "Release"

Release what you think you know. Release your assumptions. Release the stress of the day. Release your need to be right.

Step #2: "Receive"

Receiving means you open your heart. You feel the words. Remember, "You listen with your ears, but you hear with your heart." If your heart isn't open, you won't hear a thing.

Step #3: "Repeat"

This is where you use your own words to repeat back what your partner said to you. It helps the other person feel heard. It shows that you have been paying attention. So "repeat" back to them what you think you heard. Think about this like a listening echo.

Step #4: "Respond"

This is where you get to talk and respond to what you heard. But make sure that the other person is actually finished talking before responding. You may want to ask them if there is anything else.

6 Ways to Communicate Love: Men and Women

#1 Words.

- **Ecclesiastes 9:17** (NKJV) *“Words of the wise, spoken quietly, should be heard rather than the shout of a ruler of fools.”*
- **Proverbs 18:21** (NKJV) *“Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruit.”*
- **Proverbs 15:23** (KJV) *“A man hath joy by the answer of his mouth: and a word spoken in due season, how good is it!”*
- **Proverbs 15:23** (NKJV) *“A man has joy by the answer of his mouth, and a word spoken in due season, how good it is!”*

#2 - Quality time. **Ecclesiastes 3:1** (NKJV) *“To everything there is a season, A time for every purpose under heaven.”*

#3 - Gifts-creativity. Not because you are simply trying to make up for what you have done wrong. **Proverbs 19:6** (NLT) *“Many seek favors from a ruler; everyone is the friend of a person who gives gifts!”*

#4 - Acts of service. (Gas up the car, etc.)

#5 - Physical touch.

#6 - Respect. When you got married – you made a covenant with your mate... But most do not understand what the covenant is or what it means. The purpose of the covenant is to cancel out the other's weakness for strength.

Example: One man is a farmer; another is a fighter. They make a covenant. The fighter – warrior, did not know how to farm, but did like to eat well. The farmer did not know how to fight well so they made a covenant to protect and help each other. They would even change their names or put them together, just like a woman, once she gets married she takes her husband's name.

FREE INSIGHT:
Each of you has weaknesses and strengths.

It is not for you to focus on the other's weakness as a problem in the marriage, but for you learn to protect and help each other. Your mate's weakness is your strength, and your weakness is your mate's strength. The two help make one. The reason we got married is that we both have a need that we want to have met.

You need to get your expectations out in the open. Some are Biblical expectations; some are personal expectations. We can negotiate the personal but not the Biblical.



Five Basic Needs of a Man: How you can show Respect

#1 - Physical fulfillment. Sex is the #1 need

#2 - Recreational

#3 - Attract a spouse

#4 - Domestic support

#5 -Admiration and respect: Build him up. Do not try to outdo him spiritually. Example: When he comes home from Kingdom Man talking about what he learned, do not say “I’ve known that for years.”

Do not show him up spiritually in front of people. You want to be his best cheerleader. You do not want him going to work and some little slick girl becomes his cheerleader and then he comes home and you be the devil.

Five Basic Needs of a Woman: How you can show Love.

1 - Affection. That does not always mean sex to women. Affection done with words and touching without sex. Example: I got the bath water running for you baby

#2 - Honest and openness. Emotional conversations - share how you feel and discuss what’s going on in your life. She needs to share hers with you. But when she shares you may want to start trying to fix it, but she just wanted to share.

#3 - Financial support. (1 Tim.5:8) You knew she got her hair done ect. before you married her. Ladies, you knew what he could do before you married him.

#4 - Commitment. Ecc. 5:4
Mal.2:6 ...wife of my youth and covenant

Discussion Guide

#1 - Reflect on the idea that love does not always equate to joy, as mentioned in the chapter. How can effective communication bridge the gap between loving someone and truly enjoying their company in a relationship?

Notes: _____

#2 - Discuss the importance of timing in communication. Share personal experiences when miscommunication or lack of proper timing affected a conversation or a relationship. How can couples find the right moments to communicate effectively?

Notes: _____

#3 - Explore the significance of understanding the 'why' behind communication. Why is it crucial to express the reasons and motives behind what one is trying to communicate in a relationship? Share examples of situations where expressing the 'why' made a difference in communication.

Notes: _____

#4 - Delve into the relevance of choosing appropriate locations or settings for different types of communication. How does the setting impact the effectiveness of a conversation? Can you share instances when the choice of communication setting significantly influenced the outcome?

Notes: _____

#5 - Discuss the importance of discerning the right person or audience to communicate with in different situations. How does selecting the appropriate individual or group impact the quality and outcome of a conversation? Share insights or experiences regarding communicating with the right person at the right time.

Notes: _____



CHAPTER 4

Conflict Can Turn Into Blessing

It is hard to believe that conflict can turn into blessings but it's true. God loves to take bad and turn it into good. **Philippians 2:13-14** (NKJV) *"For it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure. Do all things without complaining and disputing."*

One of the main reasons for conflict is an unresolved issue or problem that has not been addressed or not addressed correctly. The unresolved problem that leads to conflict is often never really addressed. The truth is we are having financial problems, job problems, children problems, health problems, that were not addressed during the conflict.

Why not stop right now and talk about what the real problem is? There is not always a short-term solution, but addressing the problem and bringing it to light helps release some of the pressure. It all starts with admitting what the real problem is! Sometimes it is not even true but it's how you feel. You might need to say, "This might not be true to you, but I just want you to know how I feel."

Women, you need to tell men if you want them to listen or if you want them to try and fix it. Men have a hard time knowing the difference.

How each responds to this greatly determines whether it will turn into a blessing or conflict. If both are willing to respond correctly, it can be the beginning of the cure. This does not mean the problem goes away immediately, but it does mean you have agreed that there is a problem and are going to begin to work on a solution.

Admit the Problem + Respond Correctly to the Problem
= The Start of the Solution to the Problem.

The goal during conflict is to find a cure to the conflict. It is easy to complain, get upset, angry, etc. but the truth is it's hard work to bring a cure to the problem or conflict. The next time you find yourself getting upset and about to start a conflict, stop and think, "what is the cure?", not how you can get your way.

If you do not find a cure to the conflict or you do not learn to handle conflict correctly, that relationship will begin to collapse. Understand that when you find a cure to the conflict you will repeat the conflict over and over again.

The simple truth about finding a cure to the conflict is changing your focus. If you keep looking out: You focus on the problem (conflict). If you keep looking in: You are focusing on self to handle the problem (conflict). If you will both look up: You begin to focus on God who can handle any problem or conflict.

Luke 1:37 (NKJV) "For with God, nothing will be impossible."

Don't look out --- Don't look in -- Do look up!!!! Ask yourself, "Are we spending more time fighting about the conflict than focusing on the cure?"

Remember humility brings harmony.

The most mature one in the relationship
should be the first to humble themselves.

That does not always mean to agree, but it does mean to humble yourself in a way that brings harmony to the matter.

Matthew 5:5 (TEV) *“Happy are those who are humble; they will receive what God has promised!”*

Now the question comes down to do you both want to be happy? Sometimes people in a relationship form habits of arguing in a way that it has become a lifestyle. That is not the lifestyle God intended you to live.

John 10:10 (NKJV) *“The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.”*

The Truth About Conflict

Conflict – two or more people trying to occupy the same space or control the same resources.

Insight about conflict, wars, and fighting

The truth behind most if not all conflict is control – both want to control the same thing. (Money – Children – Time – ect.) Both want their way. Both want to be God.

The first conflict – The first war started in heaven: with Satan wanting to be like God – Worshiped instead of worshiping.

Examples:

- Adam and Eve: Wanting to be like God...
- Cain and Able: Cain wanted to worship the way he wanted instead of what God required.
- Pharaoh and Moses: Pharaoh's gods vs Moses' God.
- David and Goliath: Whose god is God? David's God or Goliath's

Today in the middle east there is war over whose God is God. They both want to occupy the same space and control the same resources. That is what the war today is all about.

But, what I want you to learn what the war in your life, home, family, and workplace is really about. Both want to be gods, both want control over the same space or resources..

Learning to handle conflict correctly is the tunnel to intimacy.

When handled correctly you can be closer and more intimate than you were before.

1 Corinthians 14:33 (NKJV) *“For God is not the author of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints.”*

If God is not the author of confusion, who is? Satan and has been from the beginning. Every conflict can be resolved if both parties want to follow God’s plan for it. The goal of conflict is not to win and have victory, but to resolve the conflict.

Matthew 5:9 (TEV) *“Happy are those who work for peace; God will call them his children!”*

Are you willing to work for peace, to resolve the conflict? Do you really want to be happy?

Use the “Never Again List” during conflict:

(James 1:19, NKJV; Proverbs 21:23, NLT; Proverbs 16:24, NKJV; Proverbs 15:1-2, NKJV; Proverbs 18:21, NKJV; Ephesians 4:29, NKJV)

Proverbs 21:23 (CEV) *“Watching what you say can save you a lot of trouble.”*

- Never call each other names.
- Never raise your voice.
- Never get historical. Don’t keep bringing up the past.

- Never say “Never” or “Always”.
- Never threaten divorce or separation.

Mark 10:9 (AMP) *“What therefore God has united (joined together), let not man (nothing) separate or divide.”*

Learn to make anger work for you, not against you.

Ephesians 4:26-27 (CEV) *“Don’t get so angry that you sin. Don’t go to bed angry and don’t give the devil a chance.”*

The devil’s goal is to bring division and distance between you and God. Division brings fear while oneness brings love. The devil from the beginning knew if He could bring distance between God and Adam and Eve it would bring fear and fighting.

1 John 4:18 (NKJV) *“There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love.”*

In whatever area you have fear, that is where you need love. God wants to bring oneness and to overcome fear with love; the Devil’s goal is to bring separation- division that leads to fighting and fear.

Learn the “ABCD” of anger:

Acknowledge your anger. (Yes, admit it)

Backtrack the primary emotion or cause. (This can be very hard at first, but very eye opening) Sadness, loneliness, disappointment, wrong expectations, feeling attacked, embarrassment, feeling unloved, jealousy, disrespected, insecurity, etc.

Consider the real cause is that you expected everyone to want

and to feel like you do. (What feels like truth to you might not really be the truth) Jer.17:9 “The heart is deceitful and desperately wicked” Our feelings can be fake - Our feelings can often fool us!

Determine the best way to deal with and handle the situation.



CHAPTER 4

Discussion Guide

#1 - Reflect on conflicts you've experienced. How often do these conflicts revolve around the desire for control? Can you identify instances where both parties sought control over the same space or resources? How did this understanding impact your approach to resolving the conflicts?

Notes: _____

#2 - Consider the statement that handling conflict correctly leads to greater intimacy. Have you experienced this in your relationships? Share instances where resolving a conflict deepened the bond between you and the other person. How did the conflict resolution process contribute to increased intimacy?

Notes: _____

#3 - Discuss the "Never Again List" mentioned in the chapter. Which of these guidelines resonate most with you, and why? Can implementing these principles change the dynamics of

conflicts in relationships? Share personal experiences related to these guidelines.

Notes: _____

#4 - Explore the concept of making anger work for you rather than against you. How can anger be a productive force in conflict resolution? Share strategies or instances where you've successfully channeled anger into positive outcomes during disagreements.

Notes: _____

#5 - Delve into the "ABCD" of anger - acknowledging, backtracking, considering the real cause, and determining the best way to handle the situation. How might practicing this method change the way you approach conflicts? Can you recall a specific instance where applying these steps helped in resolving a conflict?

Notes: _____





CHAPTER 5

The Secret Truth About All Problems

Fifty years ago, I really believe most of our problems were people, places and things. By that I mean I really believed when I had a marriage problem the problem was the marriage. When I had a finance problem, it was a finance problem. When I had a work or job problem, it was a work problem. When I had a relationship problem, it was the other persons problem. Most people really don't understand the truth about what the problem really is and the devil wants to keep it that way. That's why I call it the secret truth about all problems.

This truth is simple to teach but hard to apply. It's so simple many of you won't believe it or try it! Well, that's up to you to keep on fighting, being stressed out, and blaming the wrong people.

The truth...
All Problems are really HEART PROBLEMS.

- **Proverbs 4:23** (NKJV) *"Keep your heart with all diligence, For out of it spring the issues of life."*
- **Proverbs 4:23** (TLB) *"Above all else, guard your affections. For they influence everything else in your life."*
- **Matthew 6:20-21** (TLB) *"Store(treasures) them in heaven where they will never lose their value and are safe from thieves. If your profits are in heaven, your heart will be there too."*
- **Matthew 6:21** (NKJV) *"For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."*
- **Matthew 6:33-34** (NKJV) *"But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble."*

If our heart is right with God and others our relationships will be right. Remember, financial, marriage, and relationship problems are simply a reminder you are having heart problems.

The Truth About the Heart

The condition of our heart greatly determines our actions, reactions, behavior, and joy despite circumstances and situations.

Proverbs 4:23 (NKJV) *“Keep your heart with all diligence, For out of it spring the issues of life.”*

If you have an issue, it's a heart issue! If we want to know why we act and have problems in life, we must understand that they are a result of our actions, or lack of action.

It has been reported that finances are one cause of problems and even divorce in marriage. If that were true, why are movie stars and millionaires at the top of the list? Yes, money and finances can and do cause lots of stress, but many times, it is because our hearts are not right, which results in handling our finances wrong. Money was not the problem, our hearts were.

Four Simple Causes of Financial Problems:

#1 - The Lack of Contentment. (1 Thessalonians 2:5, NKJV) “For neither at any time did we use flattering words, as you know, nor a cloak for covetousness--God is witness.”

It's called the hinder sin. No one ever comes to me and says, “Pastor James, can you pray with me and for me? I have been so greedy and selfish that I've got into a money problem. Because I was not content with God's goodness, I'm now having marriage and money problems.” The truth is it all started with a heart problem.

#2 - The love of money (1 Timothy 6:10, NKJV, CEV, Matthew 6:19-21, NKJV)

- **1 Timothy 6:10** (NKJV) *“For the love(lust) of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.”*
- **1 Timothy 6:10** (CEV) *“The love(lust) of money causes all kinds of trouble. Some people want money so much that they have given up their faith and caused themselves a lot of pain.”*

It does not say money is evil, but it does warn about the love and lust of money. You don't have to have money to love and lust for it. You love - lust after money because you covet and are discontented; then you stop coming to church for work and pleasure.

You do things, thinking it will make you more money; steal, cheat, gamble, change an excellent job because you will make more money. The trade off is you'll have less time with your family and less time to serve the Lord.

The devil is the great deceiver, and his goal is to steal, kill, and destroy. The devil first makes something look good, and then before you know it, it begins to destroy you, your family, etc. Jesus began to warn us about Satan's deception, in what we call the Sermon on the Mount.

Matthew 6:19-21 (NKJV) *“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”*

The real truth is the love of money is a heart issue.

#3 - Issues Beyond Your Control

Sickness, Business layoff, etc. There is no issue beyond God's control.

Philippians 4:19-20 (NKJV) *“And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus. Now to our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen.”*

Important Insight: It's God's riches that meet our needs, not ours. God has plenty of riches and does not ever need ours, but we need His blessings and protection.

- **Isaiah 45:3** (NCV) *“I will give you the stored wealth and the hidden riches so you will know I am the LORD, the God of Israel, who calls you by name.”*
- **Proverbs 8:18** (TEV) *“I have riches and honor to give, prosperity and success.”*

#4 - Not Managing Your Money by God's Design.

Mismanaging our money is the #1 cause of stress and money problems. When we fail to manage our money according to God's plan, we plan to fail.

Matthew 6:24 (NIV) *“No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate and love one another, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.”*

Money is a cruel master to serve. When I trust God with my money, I can trust God to satisfy all my other needs. If you want to take a step toward reducing money stress, start by actively and intentionally giving to the Lord.

Most people say that does not make sense. “I’m already so in debt and can’t do that”. You’re right! It does not make sense because you keep focusing on yourself: How you are going to make ends meet, how you are going to figure things out? That’s just what the devil wants you to do: focus on and depend on you-- instead of God. Focusing on themselves was what got people into trouble in the first place. That’s called a heart problem.

Jesus wants us to take a different approach. He said His Father knows your situation; He knows how many bills you have, how many kids you have, etc. That is why He says to Seek first His Kingdom, not yours. This is not a new concept.

- **Proverbs 3:9-10** (NIV) *"Honor the LORD with your wealth, with the firstfruits of all your crops; then your barns will be filled to overflowing, and your vats will brim over with new wine."*
- **Matthew 6:21** (NKJV) *"For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."*
- **Matthew 6:24** (NIV) *"No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money"*

All these verses and teachings have led up to the answer for money, stress, and anxiety. God wants to help us get our hearts right so our lives will be right.

Matthew 6:33 (NIV) *"But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."*

Seek first means to choose what's best!

Out of everything you receive as income, you are to choose first to give to God through His church. It means do not try to take care of yourself first and then use whatever is left over to honor God. No, it means choose first to honor God, give Him the best, and then you will be amazed at what's left.

You can choose to keep trying to take care of yourself, or you can learn to begin to trust God to take care of you. Learn to honor Him first and best, and He will take care of the rest. The question is how much. Throughout all of God's word, the people who were faithful to God started with 10% -- whether animals, produce from the field, cash money, or whatever. That's the starting point. Then, as you give and God provides, you will want (not have to), you will want to give more.

I know many people think that since I am a preacher, I am just trying to get more money for myself or the church. I can tell you it's not what I want from you; It's not what God wants from you, it's what He wants for you.

I do not receive paycheck from the church; that's right, I don't get paid from the church. In fact, I pay to preach. I believe we should pay preachers and pay them well, but I have chosen not to take a paycheck from the church. I never have, even when we sure could have used it. But I never wanted anyone to think, say, or believe that's why I was preaching and serving God. I don't *have* to preach, teach, give, and serve; I *Get To* and *Love To*. It's the greatest joy in my life!

There is no greater joy than finding God's plan and purpose for your life and living it out. It results in a life of Eph.3:20

Ephesians 3:20-21 (NKJV) *"Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen."*

Debbie and I are getting to live it out!



Guard Your Heart

Why guard our hearts? It affects every area of our lives. Our hearts expose the areas where we need God's help. If I'm having financial problems, marriage problems, anger problems, worry, stress, jealousy, sexual immorality, insecurity, and even wrong priorities, they are all heart problems. The sooner we admit a problem, the closer we become to the cure for the problem.

I would start with taking the simple Spiritual Gift Test



Scan the QR Code
with your phone's camera
to take the Spiritual Gift Test

SPIRITUAL CHECKUP

I would then start on my lowest area and commit to doing it, not just talking about it. You must learn to be intentional, or it will never get done, and you will never change. If you always do what you have always done, you will get what you have always gotten. Our goal is a new and more significant result. We are proud of our 50 years of marriage and we are still going. We want the last half of your marriage to be the best half, as ours is.

Here are a few more insights about the heart before we move on. I have written chapters on wrong expectations, equity, communication, and conflict. All those do and can cause problems in marriage or any relationship, but when our hearts are right, problems are so much easier to handle. When both hearts are right, it is not that big of a deal because you can talk about it instead of fighting about it.

It truly is all about the heart!

3 John 1:2, KJVA *"Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be healthy, even as thy soul(heart) prospereth."*

Soul * heart, your health, emotions, your thinking, etc.

- **Matthew 5:8** (TLB) *"Happy are those whose hearts are pure, for they shall see God."*

Ask God To Give You A Clean Heart

- **Proverbs 23:15** (NKJV) *"My son (& daughters), if your heart is wise, My heart will rejoice--indeed, I myself."*
- **Psalms 51:10** (NKJV) *"Create in me a clean heart, O God, And renew a steadfast spirit within me."*

God and His word are the cleaning agents! A clean heart is something that has to be created and then maintained for the rest of our lives! Wisdom that can only come from God's word both creates and maintains a clean heart!

Psalms 51:11 (NKJV) *"Do not cast me away from Your presence, And do not take Your Holy Spirit from me."*

The further away we are from God's presence, the further away we are from joy! The key is how to stay close to God's presence.

Psalms 51:12 (NKJV) *"Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, And uphold me by Your generous Spirit."*

Yes, joy can be restored, and we will all have times when we need it restored. Make sure you have forgiven any that have hurt you, and you have asked those you have hurt for forgiveness.

Confess all known sins, and you are on your way to a clean heart.

Verses to Remember About Our Heart

Hard hearts Hurt others ---Humble hearts Help others -
Humble people are happy people. Or are you a helper or a
hurter? Are you happy or snappy?

- **Matthew 5:8** (TLB) *"Happy are those whose hearts are pure, for they shall see God."*
- **Matthew 5:5** (TEV) *"Happy are those who are humble; they will receive what God has promised!"*
- **Proverbs 23:15** (KJVA) *"My son, if thine heart be wise, my heart shall rejoice, even mine."*

The condition of our hearts greatly determines joy!

- **Proverbs 15:13** (KJVA) *"A merry heart maketh a cheerful countenance: but by sorrow of the heart the spirit is broken."*

Joy is greatly determined by the condition of our hearts!

- **Ezekiel 11:19** (KJVA) *"And I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within you, and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them a heart of flesh"*



Discussion Guide

#1 - How does the concept of “heart problems” challenge the conventional understanding of issues related to finances, relationships, and stress in life?

Notes: _____

#2 - The teaching emphasizes that financial problems often stem from deeper heart issues rather than the lack of money itself. How does this perspective change the way we address financial challenges?

Notes: _____

#3 - According to the teaching, what are the four main causes of money problems, and how do they connect to heart issues? Can you share personal experiences or examples that resonate with these causes?

Notes: _____

#4 - The discussion highlights the significance of aligning one's heart with God's principles for resolving life's challenges. How can the act of giving or honoring God with our finances influence our overall well-being?

Notes: _____

#5 - The teaching emphasizes the importance of maintaining a clean heart and its correlation with joy and relationships. How can individuals practically apply the concept of having a clean heart in their daily lives to enhance relationships and personal well-being?

Notes: _____



CHAPTER 6

Secrets to 50 Years and Counting

The first crucial secret of a successful marriage is what happens after marriage. It's great if you can afford a beautiful wedding and honeymoon, but rest assured, that's not what will make a successful marriage. When I say successful marriage after 50 years, my wife is still my best friend, lover, and there is no one I would rather be with. If I had it all over again, I would still choose Debbie as my wife and best friend.

Getting married does not remove all your problems, hurts, stress, and things you might be running from. But what it does do, if you both work on it and work hard, is to give you someone to share life with: someone to go through those hard times, hurts, stress, and a great time of disappointments where the two become one resulting in each carrying only half the burden.

Debbie and I got married in East Texas. Debbie rode with me that day as I worked. We then went to the justice of the peace, and yes, I even had to give blood back then, and I almost passed out. He finally got started, and Debbie began laughing -- to this day, I'm still not sure why, but I did not think it was that funny. We then went out to eat and stayed at a hotel overnight. (That was fun, but we will not talk about that.) Then I went back to work. We had no wedding ceremony, church, or honeymoon... it was only the justice of the peace, a few laughs, eating out, and returning to work.

The critical point is if you want to have a successful marriage, remember that it is what you do after the wedding. Another secret: this truth applies to all life, your job, finances, raising children, buying a house, or car. It is a secret principle that

applies to almost every area of your life. The sooner you learn it, the sooner you can work on the right area and problems.

Song of Songs 5:16 (NKJV) *“His (Her) mouth is most sweet; yes, he (she) is altogether lovely. This is my beloved, and this is my friend.”*

Debbie is truly my best friend! If you are not married, don not marry someone who is not your best friend because most others apart from Jesus will come and go. Second, if you have others who are your best friends above your mate and you want to spend all your time with them, then don't get married. Too many people get married only to then spend all their time with someone else they call their best friend. God's created order is always God, your mate, children, work, etc.

- **Proverbs 5:18-19** (NKJV) *“Let your fountain be blessed, And rejoice with the wife of your youth. As a loving deer and a graceful doe, Let her breasts satisfy you at all times, And always be enraptured with her love.”*
- **Proverbs 5:18-19** (NLT2) *“Let your wife be a fountain of blessing for you. Rejoice in the wife of your youth. She is a loving deer, a graceful doe. Let her breasts satisfy you always. May you always be captivated by her love.”*

I can tell you that I have rejoiced with the wife during my youth, and I'm still rejoicing. Yes, a significant part of the loving and rejoicing is being best friends, but because she's my wife, she can and does meet needs no one else can or ever has since we have been married these 50+ years. My wife has satisfied my every sexual need for 50+ years, and that's lots of needs and years! I still enjoy and am satisfied with her breasts. Yes, part of marriage is sex, and that's okay, but it can't be the only part. Sex is the icing on the cake! My wife has been and still is very attractive to me.

P.S. Special note: my wife and all of her body satisfies me but they are not for everyone else to see. I think women should dress nicely; in fact, men are attracted by sight. That's why you should ask your husband what he likes you to wear, but other

men don't need to look at intimate body parts. So don't wear clothes so low other men can see or be attracted to your body. A woman's body is special and just for their husband. Lol. That's how I feel anyway.

As I said, if you want a successful marriage, remember what you do after the wedding that will cause you to be successful. Next, I want you to know that having a great marriage takes lots of hard work, battles, hurts, and sorrows, but it's not only worth it; there's nothing more rewarding and satisfying. Nothing brings joy like a mate to love and share your life with—nothing except a special fellowship and relationship with Christ.

What Real Biblical Love Is

If You Want A Successful Marriage and One that Lasts You Will Need to Know What Real Biblical Love Is: What many call love today is nothing more than lust and infatuation:

We have free material if you are dating or a young person and want to know the difference between *love* and *infatuation*.



Scan the QR Code
to view the
“Love and Infatuation” Resource

Discerning Genuine Love.

Lust is using someone as an instrument for your satisfaction. So many people get into a relationship thinking the other person's job is to satisfy them. The purpose of a relationship is not simply to satisfy you but to sharpen you!

You Will Need to Know There Are Three Words For Love. Each Has a Different Meaning.

#1 - Eros Love – This is need love. It is based on physical attraction and fulfillment. This love is necessary for marriage to succeed; however, marriage cannot be sustained by eros alone. (Proverbs 5:15-19)

Proverbs 5:15-19 (NKJV) *“Drink water from your own cistern and running water from your own well. Should your fountains be dispersed abroad, Streams of water in the streets? Let them be only your own, And not for strangers with you. Let your fountain be blessed, and rejoice with the wife of your youth. As a loving deer and a graceful doe, let her breasts satisfy you at all times; And always be enraptured with her love.”*

#2 - Phileo Love – This is friendship love. The Bible uses the word “companionship” several times to describe a marriage relationship. Phileo love means reciprocal sharing of time, activities, the home, hobbies, games, and other objects of common fellowship. (Romans 12:9-13)

#3 - Agape Love – This is a giving love. This can be unilateral because one loves even when the other doesn’t respond as expected. It is self-giving in meeting the real needs of the other to help the person to become a better, more mature individual. Agape love takes the initiative and energizes the other two kinds of love. **1 Corinthians 13:4-5** (NLT) *“Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud or rude. Love does not demand its own way. Love is not irritable, and it keeps no record of when it has been wronged.”*

Agape Love + Phileo Love + Eros Love = Godly marriage that will last!

Exceptional Marriage

If you want to have an *exceptional marriage*, it will take doing some *exceptional things*. I do not think you can have the relationship God wants you to have with each other apart from an *exceptional relationship with Christ*.

You can't depend on your mate's relationship with God!

When I talk about exceptional relationship with Christ, I'm talking about you agreeing that God's word is the Ultimate Authority. The more of God's word you know and apply, the more of God's will you know! **Psalm 127:1** (NKJV) *"Unless the LORD builds the house, they labor in vain who build it; Unless the LORD guards the city, the watchman stays awake in vain."*

When I say exceptional, I'm not talking about going to church together, even though I believe that's very important. I'm talking about thinking about Jesus, talking to Jesus, allowing Him to speak to you. Read His word as He is talking to you.

Matthew 6:33-34 (NKJV) *"But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. Therefore, do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble."*

Whatever we prioritize, we have progress. Prioritize your relationship with God and your mate, and you will make progress in that area.

You have to have *exceptional self-acceptance*. You have to learn to know and believe who you are in Christ.



Scan the QR Code
to view the
"Who I Am in Christ" Resource

When you know who you are in Christ, you become:

- Accepted.
- Secure. (Romans 8:1-2)
- Free forever from condemnation.
- Significant.

Until you learn to get your acceptance, security, and significance from Christ, you will try to get it from others who can't give it to you even if they want to. For years, I would, without even knowing, try to change Debbie, try to make her the person I thought she should be, instead of focusing on becoming the right person. If we are not careful, we will fix our hopes and dreams on this person for our future fulfillment. Setting our hopes and dreams on the other person is unfair to them or you.

Learn to fix your hopes and dreams on God and seek to please Him through this relationship, and your relationship will improve. This won't just happen; you have to make an intentional effort.

1 John 4:7-8 (NKJV) *"Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God, and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love."*

You have to become *exceptionally unselfish*. By nature, we are selfish and negative. Selfishness is at the heart of most problems between people. Conflicts and disputes among believers are always harmful. Because of our lack of self-awareness, we often miss how selfish we are. Instead of seeing how selfish we are, we think we are right.

James 4:1-3 (NLT2) *"What is causing the quarrels and fights among you? Don't they come from the evil desires at war within you? You want what you don't have and scheme and kill to get it. You are jealous of what others have but can't get it, so you fight and wage war to take it away from them. Yet you don't have what you want because you don't ask God for it. Even when you ask, you don't get it because your motives are all wrong—you want only what will give you pleasure."*

Selfishness robs our joy with God and others. The only way to overcome selfishness is the love of Christ in you. Christ's love leads to wanting the best for the other person. Can you honestly say you want what's best for your mate more than you want for yourself?

If you want an exceptional marriage, it will take *exceptional forgiveness*.

Romans 12:17-19 (NKJV) *"Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,' says the Lord."* Forgiveness is not a weakness. It is the portal (way) to power.

Example: A well-known preacher said, "The hardest person he ever had to forgive was his stepfather. His stepfather used to beat him and then say, "I wish I had never bought you!" He was 15 years old when he died and we never reconciled. He did not want to forgive him. He wanted to hate him. But, later, he realized he must forgive him if he was going to move forward and be free of this hurt. My Heavenly Father says, "He never regretted purchasing me with the priceless blood of His son, Jesus Christ. His love has freed me to forgive my stepdad and bring peace about my past. I can now move forward and love and be loved."

It takes *exceptional financial principles*. Don't spend more than you make. Don't spend what your mate does not know you are spending. Make a budget together. It takes two committed to financial principles to have an exceptional marriage. Tithe 10%, save 10%, spend 80% .

If you owe more than you make, you must cut back or buy an older car or a smaller house, etc. Financial principles lead to financial freedom. Whatever you are financially connected, you will be emotionally connected.

Matthew 6:21 (NKJV) *"For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."*

That's why most arguments in marriage and the homes are over money. You start talking about money, and you will get emotional one way or another. Your heart does not belong to

Jesus until your money belongs to Jesus. When you give your money, your emotions follow. One of the main reasons to tithe and give is because it causes us to be emotionally involved with the right things and the right person—the things of God and the person of Jesus Christ. God is not trying to take from you but give to you.

It takes *exceptional moral freedom*. Don't be flirting with the opposite sex. Don't be alone - out to eat - texting - Facebook - any social media that might lead to being immoral.

- **1 Corinthians 6:18** (NKJV) *"Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body."*
- **Hebrews 13:4** (NCV) *"Marriage should be honored by everyone, and husband and wife should keep their marriage pure. God will judge as guilty those who take part in sexual sins."*

It takes *exceptional purpose* in life.

Matthew 6:33-34 (NKJV) *"But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. Therefore, do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble."*

Finding and living out our true purpose significantly reduces our worries, problems, and pains. We must understand that Jesus is our only trustworthy source of meeting all our needs, and anybody and everything else is simply a conduit God uses. We must understand our purpose after salvation is not a comfortable and pain-free life; it is doing our part in all we do, wherever we do it to further God's Kingdom, not ours. When we learn and live out our purpose, God will turn every pain into part of that purpose.

It takes *exceptional harmony* with authorities: Who are your authorities? Parents, police, pastor? Usually, if you don't have a problem with parents, police, and pastor, you won't

have a problem with the boss and teachers. If you're not in harmony with your authorities, you will have problems being in harmony at home. If you're not in harmony with your authorities, you will have a problem being in harmony with the Ultimate Authority, Jesus Christ, and the Word.

- **Romans 13:1-5** (NKJV) *"Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. Therefore, whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise for the same. For he is God's minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God's minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil. Therefore, you must be subject, not only because of wrath but also for conscience's sake."*
- **Romans 13:1-5** (NIV) *"Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right, and he will commend you. For he is God's servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also because of conscience."*

It takes *exceptional faithfulness* (Not Giving up). **Galatians 6:9-10** (NKJV) *"And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. Therefore, as we have an opportunity, let us do good to all, especially those of the household of faith."*

CHAPTER 6

Discussion Guide

#1 - Reflecting on the concept that a successful marriage involves what happens after the wedding, how does this principle apply to other aspects of life beyond relationships? Can you share examples from your own experiences or observations?

Notes: _____

#2 - The text mentions different forms of love (Eros, Phileo, and Agape). How do these distinct types of love contribute to a lasting and fulfilling marriage? Are there particular challenges in maintaining these types of love over the course of a long-term relationship?

Notes: _____

#3 - According to the reading, exceptional marriage requires exceptional principles in areas such as finances, moral

boundaries, forgiveness, and purpose in life. Which of these principles resonates the most with you, and why? How might integrating these principles impact a marriage positively?

Notes: _____

#4 - Discuss the significance of the assertion that exceptional marriage requires exceptional harmony with authorities. How might disagreements or conflicts with various authorities affect a marital relationship, and what strategies could couples adopt to navigate such situations together?

Notes: _____

#5 - The text emphasizes the importance of exceptional faithfulness in sustaining a successful marriage. In what ways do commitment and perseverance play vital roles in maintaining a healthy and enduring relationship? Can you share personal anecdotes or examples illustrating the importance of faithfulness in a marriage?

Notes: _____



CHAPTER 7

Myths About Marriage

When couples get married they ALL have myths they believe. They may not admit it but they all do. You think you will fight less, have sex more, and always speak kind words to each other, or, if you're not being kind to each other now, you falsely believe you will start. When Debbie and I first got married I falsely believed it was o.k. for me to tell her what I liked and disliked, but when she would tell me the same thing I felt she was attacking me. The truth is she was not attacking me, she was trying to make me better. Many times, when I was preaching or teaching, I would say the most embarrassing things or read the word wrong. After church she would tell me what I did, and I would get so embarrassed. She was not trying to embarrass me, but she was trying to help me. She still does that today, but the difference today is I love it because I want to get better. Yes, at age 70 I still want to grow, learn and get better. Because when you stop growing, you start dying, at 70 you can't take any chances! Fifty years ago, I thought loving my wife meant having sex. Boy, was that a myth! Not that we did not have sex, but she wanted me to hold her and tell her I loved her, etc.. The real truth about love is that it is more a right action repeated over a long period of time than an emotion or words. I know lots of people who say they love their mates and children but their actions don't prove it. What we really love we give to, put before our wants, and willingly sacrifice for that when I say sacrifice I mean giving up something you love for something you love more. It is a myth to tell your mate you love them and then not be willing to sacrifice for them. Ask yourself right now what do you sacrifice for in your relationship? I'm not talking about the poor me syndrome, I'm talking about what you are glad you can.

Hebrews 12:2 (NKJV) *“Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”*

That is what I call sacrifice with joy! Jesus did not enjoy going to the cross and going through the pain and suffering He went through. Jesus enjoyed the results of true sacrifice. Jesus gave up the life He loved for our lives, which He loved more. The real myth in marriage is that it's all about you or it's all about us, while the truth is it is all about Jesus and what He did for us as a couple.

The myth is we can be happy if our mate would only do _____, while the truth is you can only be happy when you are in the right fellowship and relationship with Jesus first and then your mate. I can tell you when Debbie and I began to put the Lord first in our marriage and life changed. In fact, I don't believe we would be where we are 50 years later if that had not happened.

Myth #1: We both expect the same things from this marriage! I don't believe you and your partner come into this relationship with the exact expectations. You have expectations from the other person, but only you know them; the same is true with your partner.

You will need to talk about your expectations for fun, work, sex, money, where you will spend your holidays, how much time the other person will spend with others, how much time and money you will give to the church, how much time you spend with parents, and talk about as much as possible and then some. Who will cut the grass, clean the house, pay the bills, do the shopping, etc? I Hope you are getting the idea.

Myth #2: Everything good in our relationship will get better. Marriage means giving up a carefree lifestyle and accepting new limits. It means there will be unexpected

inconveniences: The most dramatic loss you experience in a new marriage or relationship is the idealistic image you have or had of your partner: The longer and better you get to know someone, the more you see their shortcomings, faults, and sins. Stop looking to your mate to make you happy. If you are wise, you will allow them to help you become Holy because happiness does not last without growing in Holiness.

When I say holiness, I mean they can and will see things in our life that we don't see – If we keep believing the myth that it is our mate's responsibility to make us happy, we will become hardened and hurt constantly. But if you allow the Holy Spirit to help you see your mate as one who can help you become Holy (wholly set apart for a particular God-given purpose), Happiness will be a byproduct of the process.

Holiness means being devoted or dedicated to God, set aside for his particular use. Do you want to be set apart and uniquely used by God? Allow your mate to speak into your life in a new and exciting way.

Myth #3: Your passionate romantic feelings will last forever. Facing the fact that your mate has weaknesses and that passionate romantic feelings of love will not last forever. Addressed correctly can help the relationship to move into a more profound, authentic, and intimate love that will last and grow. It is believed the unrealistic, passionate romantic feelings we have at the beginning of a relationship can last from 3 months up to 3 years. Do not build your relationship on the butterflies but the bedrock of your foundation in Jesus.

Myth #4: Everything bad in my life will disappear. Many people marry believing the myth that they can marry and escape the unpleasantness they live in. Getting married cannot instantly heal past Hurts, but learning and dealing with past hurts and handling them correctly can help bring Healing!

We often bring our past hurts and hang-ups into our marriage without understanding or learning to deal with them.

Can you discuss past hurts and hang-ups you might have brought into this relationship? Many times, it is a needed approval from a parent. Many times, it is love you felt you did not get from a parent. Many times, it is a hurt from a past relationship. What is the most significant hurt or baggage you might have brought into this relationship? Talk about it! Don't fight about it. Ask what your parents' marriage was like. What did you like and not like about it?

Myth #5: Your spouse will make you whole. We all come into relationships with at least two things:

1. A bucket with holes and believing the myth that our mate can fill the bucket without first fixing the holes.
2. Believing that you married Mr. or Mrs. Right, Everything will be right or perfect.

We need to learn to be the right person, more than believing Mr. or Mrs. Right will make us right. Instead of looking for Mr. Right, focus on being the right person.

Depending upon the other person making you whole leads to an unhealthy relationship: Dependent partners desire happiness, not personal growth – but it won't happen, and they will often blame the partner.

Your relationship can only be as healthy as both of you are. You cannot depend upon your mate to make you whole; only Christ can do that.

Wholeness can only be found in an interdependent relationship where each person takes personal responsibility for their growth. Everything rises and falls on our fellowship and relationship with Jesus, and you cannot do it for your partner.

Relationships are also known as AHM relationships.

A-The couple has a strong couple identity but very little individual self-identity. They lean on one another: They are structured so that if one lets go, the other falls.

H-Partners stand alone, each self-sufficient, neither influenced much by the other. Little, if any, emotional connection.

M- This relationship is built on interdependence: Both partners have high and excellent self-esteem and are committed to helping their partner grow. They could stand alone but choose to be together

Relationships:

- **Independent** –Living as one, but both living separate lives.
- **Co-Dependent** – Dependent on one another; if one crashes, they both crash.
- **Interdependent** – Self-awareness of who they are individually. Operate well in a relationship -- able to support one another.

CHAPTER 7

Discussion Guide

#1 - Myth #1 emphasizes the importance of discussing expectations in a relationship. How comfortable are you and your partner discussing expectations regarding various aspects of your life together (e.g., finances, family time, household chores)? Have there been instances where unspoken or differing expectations caused friction or misunderstandings in your relationship?

Notes: _____

#2 - Discuss the notion of personal growth and happiness in Myth #2. Do you agree that seeking personal growth through a relationship is more sustainable than expecting your partner to provide constant happiness? How can couples navigate the balance between supporting each other's growth and fostering happiness within the relationship?

Notes: _____

#3 - Myth #3 challenges the idea of everlasting passionate romantic feelings. How can couples transition from the initial romantic phase to a more profound and enduring love? Can you share experiences or observations where relationships evolved from passionate feelings to deeper, enduring connections?

Notes: _____

#4 - Reflect on Myth #4, which highlights the baggage individuals bring into relationships from their past experiences. Have you and your partner discussed past hurts or hang-ups that might affect your relationship? How can acknowledging and addressing these past hurts contribute to healing and growth within a relationship?

Notes: _____

#5 - Myth #5 discusses the misconception of a partner completing or making someone whole. What are your thoughts on the concept of interdependence versus dependence in a relationship? How can couples foster an interdependent relationship where personal growth and wholeness are nurtured individually while supporting each other?

Notes: _____



CHAPTER 8

Sowing and Reaping of Marriage

How I wish I had known, believed, and applied this principle 50 years ago. In all honesty I believed give back what you're getting and then some. I believed win at all costs. If Debbie raised her voice I could do it louder; if she was a little ugly (not saying she was), I could and would be uglier. It is shameful that so many even Christian couples won't apply this law, principle, and this truth. I often use the letters H.B.O. -- Peace, Power, and Provision. Hear the Word, Believe the Word, Obey the Word; it is obeying the Word that activates the power of God. How could I, even after we got back in church, hear the word and say I believed the word and still not obey so much of the word?

Luke 6:38 (NKJV) *"Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you."*

This is one of my life verses. But, what does that mean, "It's one of my life verses"? It should mean it is a verse that I believe, live by, and has helped change my life. This verse has done that, but when my wife and I were younger, I did not apply that verse like I should have, and we could have reaped much more. I can still remember when this verse changed my heart and life. I can remember who was preaching it; Dr. Gene Pritchard at Faith Baptist Church many, many years ago. He challenged us to apply it to any and every area of our life. At this time, I was a tipper not a tither. He said just test God and see if He will not show forth His truth. It was through tithing, giving, and believing that Jesus became bigger than he had ever been. I learned that this verse applies to any and every area of our life. What we get in life is what we give or what we need in life is what we need to sow in life.

The key or secret to learning to make sowing and reaping work for you in your marriage is to learn to sow what you want to reap, not sow what you are reaping.

This will not only change your marriage, it will change your life! Most of us sow what we reap and have been blinded to the truth of what we as Christians are to sow what we want to reap, while most sow what they are reaping and miss the power of God upon their life to sow what they reap. By nature, we want to sow what we are reaping, but supernaturally, we want to learn to sow what we would like so God can and will supernaturally work in our marriage and life. This is not simply some flashy, flattering, fancy preacher saying this it is God's law and needs to be lived out.

Galatians 6:7 (NKJV) *"Do not be deceived; God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap."*

The Christian life is really all about sowing and reaping. If you have a need in your marriage, the best way to get it is to sow what you need, where you can reap what you need. The problem is most marriages want to reap what we have not sown! It does not work that way. We want our wives and husbands to treat us special, talk to us a certain way, look at us a certain way, and listen with intent and interest, but that's not what we are sowing.

Galatians 6:8-10 (NKJV) *"For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life. And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. Therefore, as we have the opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith."*

We have to keep sowing the right seed, keep waiting for the right time, and we will receive the right harvest!
Sow the seed + Wait = Harvest

This applies to every area of your life. Please tell me what you

need most, and I can tell you what you need to be sowing most; you need friends and be friendly.

Proverbs 18:24 (NKJV) *“A man who has friends must himself be friendly, But there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.”*

If you want friends, you need to be sowing friendliness but also remember you always have a friend named Jesus who will always stick closer than a brother.

Luke 6:38 (NKJV) *“Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you.”*

This is one of my life verses! You can't out-give God in any area of your life; what's coming into our life tells us what we are giving or sowing. If you keep sowing, pulling the weeds, watering, and waiting, you will reap what you sow.

The problem is most Americans are spoiled and selfish. They live for instant gratification and give up before the reward comes. Be careful not to sow judgment, condemnation, and unforgiveness. **Luke 6:37** (NKJV) *“Judge not, and you shall not be judged. Condemn not, and you shall not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven.”*

Stop judging them and start encouraging them. **Matthew 7:4** (NKJV) *“Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me remove the speck from your eye’; and look a plank is in your own eye?”*

Stop condemning and start connecting and accepting. Stop not forgiving and start forgiving.

Matthew 6:14-15 (NKJV) *“For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.”*

We often find ourselves judging our mates and others with a different standard than we do. When we do the same thing,

we self-justify why we do it. We acted like that because of what happened to me that day. I'm late because of the traffic; they don't know what I had to do to get here today. When they do the same thing, we judge them by their actions; we judge ourselves by our intent.

How can we stop judging others so much? How can we stop sowing judgment and condemnation?

Assume the Best

If you are about to get upset and start judging and condemning, stop and tell yourself, I will assume the best about that person and the situation. I wish I had learned and applied this 50 years ago in my marriage and every other area of my life. It makes such a huge difference. Learning to assume the best can also bring trust. Assume they are only late because something happened to them that they could not help.

Example: I remember when Debbie took a trip to China by herself but met a so-called friend there. I began to worry and tried to call her with the only phone number I had, but every time I called, I got someone different. A man would answer and say I don't speak good English and don't know Debbie. I would say, but this is the phone number I have. I could have let my mind run away, and it did some, or I could assume the best for and about her. That's what I did. I thought the best for her and about her, but I sure was glad when I heard from her, and she was OK.

Don't Condemn Them

Romans 8:1 (NKJV) *"There is, therefore, now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus."*

If Jesus does not condemn us, we don't need to condemn others, much less our mates. Condemnation is holding something against them, attacking, damning, and criticizing. When we get saved because of Jesus' blood, God frees us from

all condemnation, our past sins, being damned, and sets us free. When we get married, we should not hold our mate's sins against them. Self-Examination is the best explanation of what the real problem is!

Sow Encouragement

Romans 1:12 (NLT2) *"When we get together, I want to encourage you in your faith, but I also want to be encouraged by yours."*

I want to show encouragement, and I want to be encouraged by you. What if instead of sowing judgment and condemnation, we intentionally seek ways to sow encouragement daily?

2 Corinthians 13:11 (NLT2) *"Dear brothers and sisters (Husbands and Wives), I close my letter (This message) with these last words: Be joyful. Grow to maturity. Encourage each other. Live in harmony and peace. Then, the God of love and peace will be with you."*

I can tell you if it were not for my wife, I would not still be in the ministry. You have no idea how many people in CHURCH gripe, complain, are selfish, ungrateful, and come thinking church is simply all about them. I had it this week. I had a person write all kinds of things about me on Facebook because I did not baptize his daughter because of who she was, while I did not even know who she was. If I had, I would have baptized her and celebrated with the person writing about me on Facebook. I called him and told him I would be glad to baptize her again this Sunday, just me and her, and that I did not know it was his daughter. He should have come up to me, and we would have had pictures together and celebrated together. He said he was sorry for letting his mind run away with him.

This type of thing happens more than you can imagine, but if I did not have a wife like Debbie, who continues to encourage me, I would not still be in the ministry. I am also blessed with a great staff who encourages me. Thank God.

Debbie is My CEO (Chief- Encouraging - Officer). She knows

everything about me and still loves me, believes in me, and encourages me. I'm not Debbie's project - I'm her partner!

Insight to remember: We must learn to sow what we want to reap, not sow what we are reaping. Learn to Assume the best, stop Condemning, and start Encouraging.



CHAPTER 8

Discussion Guide

#1 - Reflecting on the concept of sowing and reaping in relationships, what are some specific actions or behaviors you believe contribute positively to a healthy and fulfilling marriage? How do these actions align with the idea of sowing what you want to reap?

Notes: _____

#2 - The chapter emphasizes the importance of assuming the best about others and situations. Can you recall a time when assuming the best instead of being judgmental or critical made a significant difference in your relationship or interactions with your partner or others?

Notes: _____

#3 - It mentions the dangers of sowing judgment, condemnation, and unforgiveness in relationships. How do these negative attitudes affect a marriage? Can you share experiences or examples where these attitudes hindered or damaged relationships?

Notes: _____

#4 - Encouragement is highlighted as a key element in maintaining a healthy marriage. How do you and your partner currently sow encouragement in your relationship? Are there specific ways you can enhance or improve this aspect?

Notes: _____

#5 - The chapter talks about the importance of aligning actions with the desired outcomes in relationships. Reflecting on your own marriage, do you think you're sowing the right seeds for the kind of relationship you want? How might you adjust your actions to better align with your relationship goals?

Notes: _____





CHAPTER 9

How to Get Back on Track

This is a hard one for me because we loved each other before we got into church, but it was hard to stay on track. When you're first married, you have great emotional love, but true, lasting love is more than an emotional love; it's more an action. When we were first married, sometimes we would spend time with people we loved, but people were doing things and saying things I did not want to be doing and saying. Let me put it another way: if you drink too much for too long, you will eventually do things and say things you are sorrowful for. We might have done that before we got into church a few times. When you say things you should not speak very often, you must decide to change or live the life you know is not best for you or your family.

We decided to try church mainly for our daughter Shannon at first; I believe she needed to be in church. To our surprise, we were the ones who needed to be in church in the Word and under the Word.

Not long before, we met some people at the little church on Haynes Ave. We began to have a home group, but at the time, we did not know that's what it was called. We played cards, laughed, and had fun. We didn't drink and still had fun. This is not a message about not drinking. If you can have a drink or two (or three) and can handle it, more power to you. But if it keeps leading to doing and saying things that start arguments, you might want to think about stopping, cutting back or limiting what you drink. This is complicated by the way. It might not be drinking with you; it might be drugs.

To our surprise, we began to love the church and change

friends. Some old friends got upset and thought we were becoming holier than they were. The truth is we would have loved for them to come with us.

That was our first step to getting on track or back on track. We moved to Tioga and found a church we loved called Faith Baptist Church and became very active. I even began to teach even though many times, when reading, Debbie would have to sit right next to me and help me with the Word and almost have to wipe off the sweat. But those were great years; God blessed me, and the class would grow and grow. That's where I felt the call from God under Pastor Harry Ganey.

It was not long before I got off track again; we were going to church. I was teaching but working and doing that most of my life. If there were one thing I would change, it would be to not work as long and as many hours as I did. I thank God I had a wife who was thankful she had a husband who would work when many husbands were not working. Whether it's working, a hobby, or going out with the boys or girls too much, spending too much time away will get you off track.

There will always be a battle. If you don't work hard and long enough, you will struggle with money and financial problems. If we work and play less, we can handle family problems. There is no easy answer, but just be aware of it and work to balance it. It will be a battle most of your life if you care for your family and mate.

If you both love each other, you can get back on track. I don't care how far off track you have come- if both parties want to get back on track and will apply Godly principles, you can.

Mark 9:23 (NKJV) *"Jesus told him, "If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes."*

Do you believe? **Mark 10:27** (NKJV) *"But Jesus looked at them and said, "With men it is impossible, but not with God; for with God all things are possible."*

It might be impossible if you keep trying to do it without God, but it's possible if you do it with God.

Proverbs 12:4 (TEV) *"A good wife is her husband's pride and joy."*

The goal is for your wife to be your pride and joy! If she is not right now, know that God can change that and wants that for you. I know because Debbie IS my Pride and Joy!

First, know that everyone who's married long enough gets off track at some time or another. The real question is how do you get back on track? Lots of counselors will tell you to go back to where you got off track and start there. They may be right, but that is not where I'm going with how to get back on track.

I believe you need to start with you both defining what a great or good marriage would look like. A great verse in the Bible says without a vision the people, or couple, perish. **Proverbs 29:18** (KJV) *"Where there is no vision, the people perish: but he that keepeth the law, happy is he."*

The goal is to have a Godly vision that brings happiness to you both; you can have it, but it must include God. **Proverbs 29:18** (MSG) *"If people (couple that) can't see what God is doing, they stumble all over themselves; But when they (couple) attend to what he reveals, they (couple) are most blessed."*

God not only wants you as a couple to have a Godly vision, He wants you to be happy! I believe it is time to stop focusing on all your problems and to start focusing on your Godly vision God has for you. **Habakkuk 2:2-3** (NKJV) *"Then the LORD answered me (You as a couple) and said: 'Write the vision And make it plain on tablets, That he may run who reads it'"*

You both need to know what a great marriage would look like. You might even need to write it down where you can go back and focus on it. Then run for it, give it all you got.

"For the vision is yet for an appointed time; But at the end

it will speak, and it will not lie. Though it tarries, wait for it; Because it will surely come, it will not tarry.”

It's going to happen; don't give up or get out. If you both want to have a Godly, good marriage you can, not simply because you want it, but because God wants it for you and tells you, you can have it.

It will take intentionality, not saying I'm going to try. Trying won't make your marriage better, but training will. You have to have a vision, you have to stop blaming and start aiming! Vision provides hope, and when you have the right hope you can get through almost anything. **Romans 15:13** (ESV) *“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.”*

Allow the hope of God to work in your marriage through the Holy Spirit in such a way that it begins to bring joy and peace starting right now. Define the vision, begin to declare the vision to each other, and be dedicated to it. It takes work but the work is worth it. Whatever you focus on is magnified. If you focus on the vision getting better it will. If you focus on the problems, they will be better; stop allowing distractions to cause the wrong reaction. Focus on the vision that you both have desire! Talk about what a great marriage would look like and define it right now. Declare it (talk about it right now), commit to being dedicated to it right now.

9 Applications for a Successful & Strong Marriage!

#1 - Go to church together every Sunday apart from vacation and emergency. **Psalms 127:1** (GW) *“If the LORD does not build (your marriage) the house, it is useless for the builders to work on it. If the LORD does not protect a (your marriage) city, it is useless for the guard to stay alert.”*

#2 - Pray for each other every day.



Scan the QR code and it will get you a prayer to pray for your mate for 30 days.

#3 - Write down in your notes on your phone the good things about your mate and when you get upset, read them to yourself.

#4 - Stop blaming each other! That's an inherited sin from Adam and Eve. Stop blaming and start claiming promises.

Genesis 3:8-13 (GW) *"In the cool of the evening, the man and his wife heard the LORD God walking around in the garden. So they hid from the LORD God among the trees in the garden. The LORD God called to the man and asked him, 'Where are you?' He answered, 'I heard you in the garden. I was afraid because I was naked, so I hid.' God asked, 'Who told you that you were naked? Did you eat fruit from the tree I commanded you not to eat from?' The man answered, 'That woman, the one you gave me, gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it.' Then the LORD God asked the woman, 'What have you done?' The snake deceived me, and I ate," the woman answered.*

They blamed God instead of addressing the problem and from that time on, men and women have been fighting and blaming the other one for their problems instead addressing the real problem and claiming the promises of God that will help them overcome the problem. God has promises for our problems and wants us to meet the conditions of the promise so we can receive the provisions of the promise.

#5 - Commit to Staying Together, Praying Together, Playing Together, Laying Together: **1 Corinthians 7:3** (GW) *"Husbands and wives should satisfy each other's {sexual} needs."*

#6 - Husbands love your wife and wives respect your husband.
Ephesians 5:33 (GW) *"But every husband must love his wife as he loves himself, and wives should respect their husbands."*

#7 - Have a date night once a week or every two weeks.

#8 - Go at least once a year on vacation just the two of you.

#9 - Dream together and dream big!

Discussion Guide

#1 - The chapter emphasizes the importance of recognizing when one is off track in a marriage. Can you recall a time when you realized your relationship might have been off track? What was the turning point or realization for you?

Notes: _____

#2 - Work-life balance is highlighted as a key factor in staying on track. How do you perceive the balance between work, family, and personal time in your own life? Do you think it's challenging to strike this balance, and if so, what strategies have you tried or plan to implement?

Notes: _____

#3 - The chapter talks about changing friends and the impact it had on the couple's life. How crucial do you think the influence of friends or social circles is on a relationship? Can you share an experience where changing social circles positively or negatively affected your relationship?

Notes: _____

#4 - It mentions the role of church and faith in the couple's journey back on track. How do you believe spirituality or shared faith can help a couple navigate difficult times or steer their relationship in a positive direction?

Notes: _____

#5 - Reflecting on the idea of believing in the possibility of restoration, as mentioned in the quoted Bible verses, what role does belief play in restoring a relationship? How can couples strengthen their belief in the possibility of getting back on track, especially during challenging periods in their marriage?

Notes: _____



CHAPTER 10

Knowing God's Purpose for Marriage

The problem with knowing God's purpose for marriage is most Christians and non-Christians do not know God's primary purpose for marriage. As you read this chapter, you will learn at least six primary purposes for marriage. Before you read the chapter, why don't you list what you think God's purpose for marriage is? Better yet, list what upsets you most about your marriage in the past. When I got married 50 years ago, I did not know God's purpose and did not even think about it. I was more concerned about my purpose for marriage, and I did not realize that it was not the same as God's.

When our purpose does not align with God's, it is always the wrong purpose and plan. Our purpose and plan, apart from God's purpose and plan, will ALWAYS lead to problems! We often think the problem is our mates when the real problem is the purpose and plan.

If we learn to change our purpose and plan to match God's purpose and plan, we will change most of the PROBLEMS. I am so excited about you learning God's purpose and plan for your marriage. As you intentionally apply that purpose and plan, watch how many of your problems leave and how you experience God's power and presence in a new way.

P.S. This is not a one-and-done. You will have to go back over this the rest of your married life and remind yourself because, by nature, we want our way more than God's way. Our way is most often the selfish and wrong way.

God bless, and I'm so excited for you.

The further away we get from the original intent or purpose of something, the harder it is to remember the purpose. Something's bound to break when we use something repeatedly in a way in which it was not originally intended.

If couples don't know God's purpose for marriage, they can easily do the wrong things and not be doing them on purpose. Even though the things they are doing are not on purpose, because it's not the original purpose, it's bound to break!

Note: Lust is using someone as an instrument for your satisfaction. Many couples get married thinking the other person's job is to satisfy them.

The true purpose of a relationship is not simply to satisfy you but to help sharpen you! Two become one! Two become one when we sow into each other's life so each becomes better. The purpose is to make your mate happy and holy. Holiness often hurts because it includes telling the truth. Obedience bruises, and yet, somehow, it builds. All you have to do to destroy a relationship is start looking through the lens of lust instead of love. You focus on what you can get and want instead of what you can add. Too often, couples turn people into instruments to satisfy instead of partners who sharpen and add value to the other person. When we do that, we are breaking the original intent of marriage, and the marriage begins to break.

God has to be the ultimate authority, not one of the partners. When God is not the ultimate authority, you hear crazy statements like, "I fell out of love." That's like saying, "I just fell out of the car"; you only fell out when someone opened that door.

Godly marriage is commitment over convenience, commitment over chemistry, facts over feeling, and love over lust.

Six Godly Purposes of Marriage:

#1 - Companionship. True companionship grows out of the oneness of spirit.

Amos 3:3 (NKJV) *“Can two walk together unless they are agreed?”*

Companionship is about being good company for the person you’ve chosen to share your life with. Couples that are good companions are best friends. They don’t just love each other; they genuinely like each other too. And they enjoy spending time together.

Genesis 2:18 (NKJV) *“And the Lord God said, ‘It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper (companion) comparable to him.’”*

#2 - Enjoyment. The principle behind enjoyment is self-control. **Hebrews 13:4** *“Marriage is honorable (of great worth) in all, and the bed (should be kept) undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge.”*

You, as Christian, should be the SEX-PERTS. Sex within the Marriage is both a privilege and a duty.

1 Corinthians 7:5 (NKJV) *“Do not deprive one another except with consent for a time, that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again so that Satan does not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.”*

#3 - Completeness. God designed Eve to complete that which was lacking in Adam’s life. “And Adam said...She shall be called woman, because she was taken out of man.” (Genesis 2:23). This comes from sharing emotionally, physically, and spiritually. We need to share with our mates, not others, what is going on in our life and marriage.

Three quick reasons mates go outside the marriage to share:

1. The other mate won't listen.
2. One mate feels that the other doesn't care.
3. Their mate knows them best and knows if it's feelings or facts. (Your words and conduct don't match). The mate who knows them the best could give them the answer. But they don't want to hear it.

#4 - Fruitfulness. God's first command in Scripture is, "Be fruitful (Hebrew parah, make increase after your kind), and multiply (Hebrew Rabah, increase with exceeding abundance of children), and replenish the earth (Hebrew male, fill up the world to overflowing)..." (Genesis 1:28)

Genesis 3:20 (NKJV) *"And Adam called his wife Eve because she was the mother of all living."*

The very word Eve MEANS "Life-giver." The wife is the one who brings life into the family. She helps make it a little heaven or hell. Life-givers bring children into the home and help fulfill her purpose.

#5 - Protection. The husband is to protect the wife by laying down his life for her (See Ephesians 5:25). The wife is to protect the home (See Titus 2:4-5). Parents are to protect their children, to raise up a Godly seed (See Malachi 2:25; Psalm 112:1-2).

#6 - Typify Christ and the Church. Marriage is to be a human object lesson of the divine relationship between Christ and believers (See Ephesians 5:31-33).

Ephesians 5:31-33 (NKJV) *"For this reason, a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church. Nevertheless, let each one of you in particular so love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband."*

Each mate is a type of Christ in the home!

Discussion Guide

#1 - Reflecting on the six purposes outlined in this chapter (Companionship, Enjoyment, Completeness, Fruitfulness, Protection, Typifying Christ and the Church), which purpose resonates most with your personal understanding of marriage? How has this understanding influenced your marital dynamics?

Notes: _____

#2 - The chapter emphasizes that misunderstanding or neglecting the original purpose of marriage can lead to difficulties. Have you encountered moments in your marriage where a lack of understanding or alignment with these purposes resulted in challenges? How did you navigate these instances?

Notes: _____

#3 - Discuss the significance of the analogy between marriage and typifying the relationship between Christ and the Church. How does this comparison impact your perception of the roles and responsibilities within a marriage?

Notes: _____

#4 - Considering the concept of completeness within marriage, what steps can couples take to ensure they maintain emotional, physical, and spiritual sharing exclusively within their relationship? How can this contribute to a stronger marital bond?

Notes: _____

#5 - Among the purposes discussed, which one do you think couples commonly overlook or underestimate in the context of modern marriages? How might acknowledging and prioritizing this purpose impact the quality of a marriage in today's society?

Notes: _____





CHAPTER 11

Cure vs. Conflict

One night, When Debbie and I were first married, we got into a conflict that I thought I should have won, like always. We were still conversing when it became bedtime, so I decided to sleep on the couch. I thought she would tell me she was sorry the whole night and to please come to bed, but she never came. The following day, I was still upset with her. I told her I could not believe she had not come and asked me to come to bed. She said, “I was not the one who left.”

Ephesians 4:26-27 (CEV) *“Don’t get so angry that you sin. Don’t go to bed angry or give the devil a chance.”*

I then understood that verse: it hurts you worse than the person you are angry at. I decided at that point I didn’t want to sleep on the couch anymore, and I didn’t want to go to bed angry anymore.

The truth is, the longer you put off settling your conflict, the more room you give to the devil and the blinder you get to the truth. The devil is a liar, and there is no truth in him. His primary weapon is to get us to believe his lies. **John 8:44** (GW) *“He has never been truthful. He doesn’t know what the truth is. Whenever he tells a lie, he’s doing what comes naturally to him. He’s a liar and the father of lies.”*

Many times, because the conflict has gone on and on, we find ourselves focusing on and talking about the conflict more than the cure. We need to start focusing more on the cure than the conflict. Anybody can start a conflict and then focus on it. It takes love and maturity to focus and find a cure.

If you don’t find the cure, you will keep repeating the conflict.

Some people have gotten so used to the conflict that it has become common, and it feels uncommon if there is no conflict. To put it another way, conflict has become nature, and when there is no conflict, they feel unnatural and will cause a conflict.

Just like the children of Israel, God had delivered them from bondage, parted the Red Sea, rained food out of heaven, etc. Yet, they had become so comfortable in bondage that when God freed them, it was not comfortable or normal. Eventually they wanted to go back into bondage.

Numbers 14:1-3 (NKJV)

“So all the congregation lifted up their voices and cried, and the people wept that night. And all the children of Israel complained against Moses and Aaron, and the whole congregation said to them, ‘If only we had died in the land of Egypt! Or if only we had died in this wilderness! Why has the LORD brought us to this land to fall by the sword, that our wives and children should become victims? Would it not be better for us to return to Egypt?’”

This happens in marriage. All the times you have fought and focused on during the conflict instead of the cure. When there is no conflict, you start one! Remember, if you don’t handle conflict correctly, every relationship will collapse.

Change your conversation from conflict to caring. Change from simply being and saying you’re saved to being transformed. Way too many people talk about being saved and reborn, but few talk about being transformed. Please spend some time talking about how we are reborn and transformed.

Romans 12:1-2 (NKJV)

“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.”

The exciting thing about talking about being transformed and

not only reborn is that you begin to renew your mind; you start thinking about the right things, Godly things! You focus on things God can do and will do, and how God wants you to have a Godly, peaceful, and happy marriage. Not only does God want you to have a Godly, peaceful, and happy marriage, but He tells you how. Begin to renew your mind with God's word, what God says about you, who you are, and what he wants for your marriage. You no longer have to fight about who is correct because you both know God's word is right.

As you both begin to be transformed, you become humble, and being humble brings harmony and happiness. You begin to know God's will for your life. You are the happiest you will ever be when you start to live out God's will for your marriage.



Discussion Guide

#1 - Reflect on a conflict you've faced in your relationship. What were some ways the focus shifted more towards the conflict than finding a solution (cure)? How might you redirect the focus towards finding a cure instead of dwelling on the conflict?

Notes: _____

#2 - The chapter mentions the danger of becoming comfortable with conflict to the point where its absence feels unnatural. Have you experienced a similar dynamic in your relationship, where prolonged conflict became the norm? How did you work to break this pattern?

Notes: _____

#3 - Discuss the concept of transformation in the context of marriage. How does the idea of being reborn versus being

transformed impact the way couples navigate conflicts and seek resolutions in their relationship?

Notes: _____

#4 - The chapter emphasizes the renewal of the mind through God's word as a means to transform perspectives and behaviors in marriage. How can couples practically integrate spiritual growth and the study of God's word into their efforts to resolve conflicts and promote harmony?

Notes: _____

#5 - Consider the statement that humility brings harmony and happiness in marriage. Share an instance where humility positively influenced a conflict resolution or diffused a potentially challenging situation in your relationship. How can fostering humility contribute to a healthier marriage dynamic?

Notes: _____



CHAPTER 12

Prayers with Your Partner

The truth is most of my prayers with Debbie are at meals! We should pray more together; the sooner you start that, the better. You have some guidelines in the pages to follow. You could also pray blessings over them.

Numbers 6:24-26 (GW) *“The LORD will bless you and watch over you. The LORD will smile on you and be kind to you. The LORD will look on you with favor and give you peace.”*

Pastor Steven’s wife has asked her husband to do something in 2024. The children’s pastor will speak Proverbs 31 over her in the coming year. This is such a great idea!

I ask the staff to pick a word for the year every year, and Miranda picked the word virtuous. To help her grow in that area, she will have her husband, Steven, speak those words over her! (Amen)

Most of my greatest prayers for Debbie are in the morning when I spend time with the Lord in my office. This year, I hope to do better, praying with my wife.

Prayers we can pray with our partner that will strengthen our marriage. *Psalm 12:1-3, Matthew 6:9-13*

Psalms 23:1-6 (NKJV) *“The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters. He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness For His name’s sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; For You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; My cup runs over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me All the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD Forever.”*

Psalms 23:1-6 *The LORD is our (_____ & _____) shepherd:
(_____ & _____) shall not want.*

v1. The LORD is our shepherd we shall not want.

v2. He makes us to lie down in green pastures: He leads us beside the still waters:

- Still waters is peacefulness, calmness & no worries!

v3. He restores our soul: He leads us in the path of righteousness For His name's sake.

- Restores our soul, heals our emotions, and all our hurts. He leads us on the right path.

v4. Yea, though we walk through the valley of the shadow of death, we will fear no evil: For you are our rod and staff, you will comfort us.

- You will be with us during our dark times; we don't have to fear because we are allowing you, God, to be our Rod and Staff, so it brings comfort instead of fear to us.

v5. You prepare a table before us in the presence of our enemies. You anoint our head with oil: Our cup runs over. God has gone before us, is with us, and takes care of all our enemies. v6. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow us, All the days of our life: And we will dwell in the house of the LORD Forever.

- God is going to be good to us and show mercy to us all the days of our lives: The Lord will give us what we need, not what we deserve. Amen!

Matthew 6:9-13 (NKJV) *"In this manner, therefore, pray: Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen."*

v9. In this manner, we will, pray: Our Father in heaven Hallowed be Your name.

- You are the God Who deserves my praise and worship. You are the God above all gods. I believe that You are the only God.

v10 Your kingdom come. Your will be done in our life on earth as it is in heaven.

- We want to do your will in our marriage, bring some Heaven into our marriage here on earth.

v11. Give us this day our daily bread.

- You are the God Who gives me food, shelter, and clothing and meets every need in our lives.

v12. And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. We ask you to forgive us today of all our sins _____, and we want to forgive anyone and everyone who might have sinned against us.

v13. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, power, and the glory, forever. AMEN!

- We thank you for having the power to deliver us from temptation and evil, help us to continually depend upon you, and bring glory to you forever. Amen!

Discussion Guide

#1 - Reflecting on Psalm 23 and Matthew 6:9-13, what specific phrases or verses from these prayers resonate most with you and your partner in the context of your marriage? How might these prayers help address challenges or enhance strengths in your relationship?

Notes: _____

#2 - How can the act of praying together with your partner influence the dynamics within your marriage? Discuss the potential impact on communication, understanding, and mutual support by engaging in joint prayers.

Notes: _____

#3 - Share a personal experience when praying together with your partner positively affected your relationship or helped

you navigate a difficult situation. How did it influence your perspective or approach to the challenge you were facing?

Notes: _____

#4 - Consider the elements included in the prayers outlined in the chapter (from Psalm 23 and Matthew 6:9-13). Are there any additional aspects or specific requests you and your partner would include in your joint prayers for your marriage? Why are these aspects important to you both?

Notes: _____

#5 - Discuss potential barriers or hesitations couples might face when starting to pray together regularly. How can couples overcome these obstacles and establish a habit of praying together, creating a deeper spiritual connection in their marriage?

Notes: _____



CHAPTER 13

Love the Season

Debbie and I are in a new and exciting season of life. It is the first time I do not own or run businesses or have kids or grandkids living at home.

It will be a GREAT season, but we have learned to enjoy every season. We have learned to enjoy the journey. My outlook at age 70 and 50 years of marriage is life has only begun.

We have seen Ephesians 3:20 come to life; live and enjoy it.

Ephesians 3:20 (NKJV)

“Now to Him who can do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us.”

It's one thing to talk about Ephesians 3:20; it's another to live and enjoy.

We have seen and lived it out in every area of our lives - marriage, church, finances, and family. This is called loving every season of your life!

Where Do We Go From Here?

Ecclesiastes 3:1 (NKJV) *“To everything there is a season, A time for every purpose under heaven.”*

I love this verse; it reminds us to learn to enjoy every season of life. Enjoy when you're first married. I can still remember those times! We drove to the Justice of the Peace in East Texas and got married! If I remember correctly, Debbie laughed during part of the ceremony, which was not very romantic. We spent the night in a hotel and went out to eat, which was romantic.

After 50 years, that is why it is so important to remember if you want to have a successful marriage that will last 50+ years and she will still your best friend and love of your life. Remember, it's what you do to have the marriage that makes a great marriage!

My point is we did not have a church wedding; there was nothing wrong with that. We did not have a honeymoon, but what we did do was learn to enjoy the moment and season we were in.

Later, we had kids. When you have kids, you must learn to enjoy that season. That's not a season in which you can go and simply do what you and your mate want to do. That's the season Debbie and I are finally in at 70 years old! But when you have babies and young children, that's simply the season you're in. You need to learn to enjoy them, and the season you are in.

Caution: That does not mean we should not make time for each other. When possible, still have a date night. At first, you will have to bring the baby with you, but take time for yourself in time. Remember, this is a season, but this season will pass, and you will still have your mate if you handle the seasons correctly.

Then you will move into the teen years. Hopefully, you have built equity and connections with your teen. If not, it is hard to start if you wait until then. The time to build equity and connection is when your children are young. They still love you and even want to be with you. Believe it or not, when they are young, they still believe you are smart. That, too, will pass. But if you have built equity and connection even during times of disagreement, (which is healthy as they grow and mature and feel they need to make some of their own decisions), they won't want to lose that connection. That connection you made while they were young keeps bringing them back as they get older. This allows us to enjoy the season.

Then they finally began to move out!!!! Some call it the empty nest season; I call it the freedom season!!!! If you and your mate have maintained the relationship you should have, you will be sad and glad at the same time. Learn to enjoy this season of being able to go without worrying about the children.

Then comes the retirement season, which has been very complicated for me. I'm 70 and love preaching more than ever! God's blessing with more fruit in my latter years than my younger years.

Psalm 92:14 (NCV) *"When they are old, they will still produce fruit; they will be healthy and fresh."*

Genesis 25:7-8 Abraham lived for 175 years, and he died at a ripe old age, having lived a long and satisfying life. He breathed his last and joined his ancestors in death. I don't think I will live to 175 years, but I believe God has and will give me a long and satisfying life!

At 70, this is the first time I have not owned businesses and preached. This is going to be an incredible season that I'm looking forward to and Debbie and I will embrace it.

Here's the point: don't wish your life away, saying things like, "I can't wait until I retire, I can't wait until the kids are gone" (even though you might not say that, but think it), or "I can't wait until we have enough money to do_____."

The real key to a happy life and marriage is learning to enjoy and be happy in every stage. Life is not so much about age, as it is how you live it.

Philippians 4:11-13 (NIV) *"I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content, whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need and what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well-fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or*

in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength.”

Contentment is a learned secret that comes as we learn to focus on all God has given us and not all we don't have. Focus on the good qualities and characters of your mate and children, and intentionally thank God regularly for what He has done and is doing.

Ecclesiastes 5:18-20 (CEV) *“What is the best thing to do in the short life that God has given us? Let us enjoy eating, drinking, and working hard. This is*

**Learn to enjoy every season!
Enjoy not only the season but also every minute.**

“Suppose you are very rich and able to enjoy everything you own. Then go ahead and enjoy working hard—this is God's gift to you. God will keep you so happy that you won't have time to worry about each day.”

It's mine and Debbie's prayer that you will not only enjoy every season, but that God will keep you so happy you won't have time to worry! Debbie and I love you and want the best for you!

Love,
Pastor James & Debbie Greer
We have only begun!
Ephesians. 3:20 lived out!

Discussion Guide

#1 - Reflecting on the various seasons of marriage mentioned in the chapter (early marriage, parenting young children, the teenage years, empty nest, retirement), which season resonates most with you at this point in your life? How do you feel about this season, and what aspects do you find particularly challenging or rewarding?

Notes: _____

#2 - How can the concept of enjoying every season in life be applied practically within a marriage? Share examples of how you and your partner have navigated or are currently navigating different seasons together. What strategies or attitudes have helped maintain joy and contentment during various phases of life?

Notes: _____

#3 - The chapter emphasizes the importance of not wishing away present moments for future expectations (e.g., retirement, empty nest). Discuss ways in which couples can cultivate contentment and gratitude for the current season while still having dreams and aspirations for the future. How do you balance embracing the present while planning for what's ahead?

Notes: _____

#4 - According to the reading, contentment is a learned secret that involves focusing on gratitude for what one has. How do you and your partner practice gratitude in your marriage? Share specific practices or routines that contribute to a sense of contentment and appreciation for each other and your life together.

Notes: _____

#5 - Ephesians 3:20 is mentioned as a reference to ongoing growth and blessings. How do you interpret this verse in the context of your marriage and your future together? Share ways you and your partner envision continuing to grow, adapt, and deepen your relationship moving forward.

Notes: _____



It's not the decision that makes it a great decision... it's what you do after. *Learn insights from 50 years of marriage.* Through this book, I hope your marriage and relationships go from ordinary to extraordinary.

-James W. Greer

"The family is the building block and backbone of our society and under attack from many directions. In his book, *Beyond Vows*, Reverend Greer uses biblical truths and practical antidotes learned from many years of experience as a husband, pastor and counselor to help the reader strengthen their family relationships. Whether engaged, newly married, or a veteran of many anniversaries this book is thought provoking and full of special insights."

-Teddy Price
President & CEO and Owner
Central Management Company, Inc.



Journey
CHURCH 

FIND THIS RESOURCE & OTHERS

WWW.JAMESWGREER.COM

WWW.JCPINEVILLE.COM

SEARCH FOR "JCPINEVILLE" IN YOUR APP STORE