

JAMES FORD

Seven Reasons Why
God Created
Marriage



Reason #3

The Perfecting Reason

*Reinforces a
Spiritual Reception*

I will never forget what transpired between a former associate pastor and his wife. Sister Davis would approach Brother Davis at the end of Sunday service with her hands on her hips and attitude written all over her face. Just like a well-memorized script, she would say, “Davis, let’s go, boy. I’m hungry!” Immediately, he would snap back at her, “Wait until I get through with my conversation!”

Sister Davis would then respond, “Look, boy. We’ve been here since 8:00 a.m. and after three services, I’m hungry. Wrap that conversation up so we can go.” It would make her just that much angrier when he would coolly respond, “I said, we’ll go when I finish talking with my pastor and these brothers.”

Just as a reminder to him, she would stomp away and sulk within visible distance. This scenario was repeated virtually every Sunday for several years. After a while when I just couldn’t take it any longer, I called her one Sunday evening and the following conversation ensued.

“Sister Davis, this is Pastor Ford.”

“Hello, Pastor.”

“How are you this fine Sunday evening?”

“Well, to be honest, Pastor, I’m trying to recover from my ordeal with my husband. He knows we’re at church nearly six hours every Sunday and sometimes we haven’t even had breakfast. Yet, after the services have ended, he has to stand around running his mouth with the fellas. Every Sunday I tell him not to do that but every Sunday it’s the same thing. The worst part is that we fuss and argue from the time we leave the parking lot, we eat our meal in silence, and then go to bed sleeping back to back.”

“Sister Davis, I’d like to help you change all of that, if you’ll let me.”

“Of course, I will let you, Pastor. Just tell him to start being more sensitive to me on Sundays and maybe that will do it.”

“I don’t believe that’s the answer, Sister Davis.”

“Well, what is it, Pastor?”

“You know, the Bible teaches that a man needs respect. Right?”

“Yes, I know that it does.”

“Well, do you think he feels respected when you approach him while he is talking to other men, commanding him with your hands on your hips and calling him *boy*?”

“Now, Pastor, we call each other boy and girl on a regular basis. And—”

“Wait, please hear me out before you go on the defensive. Let me suggest that next Sunday, instead of taking your usual stance, try this instead: Don’t approach him like you’re angry. Walk up to him and say, ‘Excuse me, gentlemen.’ Then say, ‘Sweetheart, may I speak to you in private for a moment?’ When he says okay, put your arms around his waist, look into his eyes, and softly say, ‘Baby, I’m hungry. Let’s leave and get something to eat, please.’”

On the following Sunday evening, I was well into my after-hours worship services ritual, meaning I was allowing the TV to watch me. Then, my wife woke me up with an apology. She said, “Honey, I apologize for waking you up, but Sister Davis is on the phone. I told her that I didn’t want to wake you but she said that it was urgent.”

I answered the phone only to hear the very enthusiastic voice of Sister Davis exclaiming, “Oh, Pastor, I’m sorry for having Sister Leslie wake you up, but I had to let you know that I did exactly what you instructed me to. And I must say that we had the best Sunday we’ve had in years. When I said what you suggested, he said, ‘Okay, Baby.’ Then he turned to the brothers

and told them he would talk with them later. He said, ‘I have to take my honey out to eat.’”

“Pastor, we had a very pleasant conversation on the way to dinner. We also had a great conversation over dinner. Then, we went home and did something on a Sunday evening that hadn’t happened in many years. So, I just had to tell you how much I appreciate your showing me how to be a better wife to my husband.”

I laugh about this incident every time I think about it. Now, this story could have been a reverse situation where the husband needed some advice on how to treat his wife. But the reality is that it reinforces God’s third reason for creating marriage—the perfecting reason.

The Art of Receiving

*“So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man,
and he slept; then He took one of his ribs and
closed up the flesh at that place.*

*The Lord God fashioned into a woman the rib which
He had taken from the man, and brought her to the man.*

*The man said, ‘This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh;
she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.’”*

—GENESIS 2:21–23

Did you know that as a married couple you and your mate are supposed to bring out the best qualities in each other? The third reason why God created marriage was to create a spiritual reception between the husband and wife to prepare them for just that purpose. In fact, I call it the perfecting reason.

The way in which God brought together the first two individuals was so that they would accept each other in their respective roles. In Adam’s acceptance of Eve as his counterpart he fulfilled God’s design for the man’s role in marriage. Adam was now complete in every sense of his being. The same is true of Eve’s existence. The moment God created her out of the man and joined her together with her counterpart, Eve’s total makeup as a

woman was complete. The couple graciously received their individual parts and the two became one flesh just as the three Members of the Trinity are one God.

Together, the man and woman became a fulfillment of God's desire for them to complete each other in matrimony. But what does it really mean for one person to complete another? And how do we recognize it when we think in terms of a marriage relationship? At first glance, two people "completing" each other sounds like the sugary words from the lyrics of an old love song. But it goes much deeper than that. It is a God-inspired idea.

When a man and woman complete each other it means they are positioned to enrich each other's lives. And that is what the perfecting reason for marriage is all about. To "perfect" something or someone means to make it or them better. God set this pattern so that what takes place in a marriage union is that the husband and wife receive each other in a physical and spiritual way. It is how He intends for us to perfect each other. You see, a husband is incomplete within himself and a wife is not complete on her own. Together they become one whole unit; they perfect each other. However, it is up to us to follow God's blueprint and reach the level of perfection in marriage that He has made possible for us.

No matter where it takes place, the ritual of marriage is done in the eyes of God. Once they are joined together, a bond is formed and the need for the couple to complete each other continues to grow until they fully perfect one another.

Let me tell you what I mean because if you want your marriage to operate in God's way, you and your spouse will need to understand the concept of being completed and perfected. The perfecting reason has everything to do with cooperating with God so that you and your mate find genuine love and fulfillment with each other. Through this chapter, I want to help you understand and come to a new appreciation of the success you can achieve together as husband and wife in the eyes of the Lord.

Let me take you back to the beginning of time for a minute when a perfect Creator put forth a perfect plan. His goal was to give man and woman every accommodation that they would need to be content as husband and wife. In a spiritual sense, Adam was an incomplete being before God created Eve. He was physically intact but something was missing from his life. He

did not have everything that he needed to match the blueprint God had drawn up for the human family that He was planning to live on earth. So, God caused Adam to sleep and took a piece of his rib to create Eve. Now, Adam was half the man he used to be because a physical part of him was taken away. But God used that same part to create Eve. In His wisdom, this was all part of His plan to form a partnership so that the individual partners would not just coexist but they would actually complete each other.

Moreover, God gave the man and woman the ability to better each other's experience on earth. This is a lifelong process; it doesn't happen overnight. When you think about your own relationship, you will most likely agree that there is always room for improvement. Well, just as He did for the first couple, God made preparations for you and your spouse to develop and improve your relationship over time. Even the little things that you do when you treat each other with kindness such as anticipating her needs, rubbing his tired feet, and sending flowers for no apparent reason. These are things that build each other up. Brother and Sister Davis were doing just the opposite by being on a destructive path of tearing each other down. It only took a simple suggestion to help them turn their situation around. When Sister Davis acted on it, they both got the benefit.

The same applies to you and your spouse. You cannot find perfection in having a negative attitude toward your mate. You can only reach the kind of perfection God wants for you by showing love toward one another. This is what Sister Davis realized when she took my advice. When she began to approach her husband in a positive way, then he was able to respond favorably to her. The change in behavior that she adopted proved successful to get both of them results they were pleased with. That change took their attention away from their negativity and shined the spotlight on their love. That's what God is talking about.

Not for Women Only

There is another element to the idea of perfecting your mate. Yes, Eve completed Adam. But she also complemented him. It is important that we understand how we are to complement our mates. When operating in perfect harmony as a pair, a male and female balance each other—like a matching

set of bookends. One is always ready and willing to hold up the other; when all else fails, they can rely on each other's support.

We covered the role of the husband in the previous chapter. Now, listen to this verse that directly speaks to the role of the woman in the perfecting process.

“And the Lord God said, ‘It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him.’”

—GENESIS 2:18 KJV

God created Eve for the two reasons found in this verse: partnership and perfection. The first part of the verse deals with the element of partnership that we covered in chapter 2. However, the second part of the verse, *I will make him a help meet*, is all about the woman's function of perfecting the man. It was never God's desire for the man to carry out his intended purpose on earth all by himself. Adam needed someone to work alongside him. Therefore, God brought them together so that the husband and wife's relationship could look and act like God's image of Himself—the Trinity.

From the wife's perspective, her reason for being a partner in the marriage is to perfect her husband. In today's language we would use the word *helper* instead of *help meet*. Let me explain what that means. The word *helper* comes from the Hebrew word *ezer*. Now, there are only two people in the Old Testament who were called *ezer*: God and the woman. Since we are God's created beings, we look to God as the “Big Ezer.” The psalmist declared, “*I will lift up my eyes to the mountains; from where shall my help come? My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth*” (Psalm 121:1–2). He asked the question and then answered it: Where does my help (or *ezer*) come from? My help (or *ezer*) comes from the Lord.

Later, the writer of the book of Hebrews declared, “*The Lord is my helper [ezer], I will not be afraid. What will man do to me?*” (Hebrews 13:6). As the people of God, we look to Him for help to overcome the pressures and challenges of life. That is what He expects us to do and that is what we should do.

But exactly why would the Bible call the woman the “little *ezer*”? The old saying “Behind every good man is a good woman” is actually full of

wisdom. The word *helper* is so rich with positive meaning; notice how it suggests that the woman provides benefit, improvement, assistance, support, relief, rescue, prevention, remedy, and comfort. These are all characteristics of what a helper does. And part of God the Holy Spirit's role in the Trinity is to be our Helper. So then, the woman and the Holy Spirit share a related role. Her part in the image of the Trinity is illuminated as she helps her husband in similar ways that the Holy Spirit helps God's children overall.

So, make a note, brothers, and always keep this in your mind. The reason God calls the woman "little ezer" is because there are certain blessings that God has reserved for the marriage that He will only channel through the wife. When you put your wife on a pedestal, in a uniquely God-ordained way, you receive the kind of help from your wife that only she can provide. There are some times when God expects a man to submit to his wife because she has special favor given to her by God. Husbands must learn to acknowledge and accept that truth. That is why God joins a man and woman together in holy matrimony (Genesis 2:22).

Let's look at Proverbs 18:22 which says, "*He who finds a wife finds a good thing and obtains favor from the Lord.*" Notice that the word *finds* suggests a passive event, which means a man is not to go out and actively look for a wife. Rather, it means that he should rest in something while that something does the work for him. Well, that "something" is the power of the Holy Spirit. And when you trust in Him, through God's power, a man finds a woman of quality that brings him abundant favor from the Lord.

I have preached many sermons on the subject of favor, and I contend that it's far better to have favor than to have money. You cannot depend on mere money because your money can run out. But if you have favor, you can always get money because you are depending on God who gives you favor. And God never runs out of anything.

Hear what Proverbs 19:14 says about finding the woman who will perfect her man. It is a blessing that only God can make happen.

*"House and wealth are an inheritance from fathers,
but a prudent wife is from the Lord."*

There is a special kind of favor that comes from a wife and flows through to her husband. Let me give you a real example of what having favor is all about. A few years ago my wife and I were preparing to go on a two-week vacation in Bermuda. We stayed in the most expensive hotel on the island and enjoyed all of its wonderful amenities. And, guess what? It didn't cost us a penny. You know what that is called? Favor! Now, don't hate—celebrate! I know that such a good thing came to us because my wife, Leslie, is a woman of God who is blessed with skill and wisdom. And I see how those benefits work out in our marriage.

Brothers, you have to get over your male-ego hang-ups to understand who your wife is in God's eyes and how she complements you. In that way, whenever the two of you come to an area where she excels, you defer to her and you don't default to a "headship" error. In other words, remember what true headship is all about and don't try to pull rank on her when God wants to bless you through her. You see, when you submit your life to living God's way, there is much benefit derived from acknowledging Him and putting forth the effort to follow His lead.

Many times I use the experiences of my wife and me as an illustration. I declare that my wife is an asset who hooks me up with something that I can't get by myself. God blesses us with special favor because of her faithfulness. Let me tell you what I am talking about. We live in a house today that we couldn't afford at the time when we bought it. My wife was a personnel director and I was a pastor. At that time, she was making twice as much money as I was. But on payday she brought her check home to me. No, I didn't club her over the head and demand that it be that way. This was something we had agreed on. I am the man of the house and I am the financier in our family. We discussed it, and based on who we are and our family dynamics, that is how we decided it would be. I also happen to be the frugal person in the family. Now, I've heard some people call it cheap but that's because they simply don't understand frugality.

Furthermore, out of her willingness to do what was best for our family, my wife sacrificed her education and her career to stay home and raise our children. After the kids got older, I regretted having to say to her, "I know that our agreement was that when our youngest turned thirteen years old you could go back to work. But now our children are being recruited by

gangs. For their sake, I need you to come back home.” She said, “When?” I said, “Well, give them your two-week notice when you go in today.” She gave her two-week notice, came back home, and we went back to having one income.

This is a good example of what complementing is all about. I praise God for a wife who complements me and functions as the partner God made her to be. And one good thing leads to another. I had promised her when I finished school and we got stable that it would be her turn. At that point I said to her, “Now it’s your turn. I’m going to do whatever God gives me to do to get you what you want.” I asked her, “Do you want to go back to work?” She responded, “Well, I don’t want to work.” I said, “Okay. Do you want to go to school?” She replied, “Well, I don’t even think I want to go to school. You’ve got enough education for both of us.”

So, I asked her, “Well, what do you want?” She said, “I want a house. When we left Pittsburgh there were two things that I felt were sacrificed for Christ.” To my question, “What were they?” her response was, “My family and my house.” We had just bought a starter home and she was crazy about that house. She told me that it was hard for her to give up that house and to live in a run-down apartment. And so, I told her, “It’s your time. Whatever it is that you want, sweetheart, that’s what we’re going to go after.”

We had a friend who was always doing nice things for us. So, on one occasion my wife and I took him to dinner to show our appreciation. As we dropped him off at his house, we pulled up and I said, “That’s your house?” He replied, “Yeah. Are you guys looking for a house? If you’re in the market, you ought to buy this one.” My wife said, “Whoa.” And I echoed, “Whoa. What are you selling it for, \$210,000?” He said, “No, you’d better double that and add \$5,000. It’s \$425,000.” I exclaimed, “What! Babe, we can’t afford anything like that.”

He asked if we wanted to see it and I said no. I had enough sense to know that it is not a good idea to show a woman something that you can’t afford, knowing that she is going to want it. But, of course, my wife said she wanted to see it, which meant that we were going to see the house. (Brothers, I hope you are taking notes.) I’ve also learned that although you don’t volunteer to let a woman see something she wants that you can’t afford, you don’t stop her from seeing it when she says she wants to. So, I agreed.

Our friend went in first, she walked in second, and I entered last. She looked at the living room and then toward the kitchen. Suddenly, she announced that this was her house. I don't think she meant to say it out loud. He heard her say something and asked her what she'd said. My wife said she was just talking to herself, but I repeated her words. Apparently this was something he had heard before because his reply was, "Oh, Sister Ford, if I had a nickel for every woman that said God had told her this is her house, I wouldn't have to sell it. Do you know whose house this is? Whoever gives me \$425,000."

When we got back in the car, I tried to soften her disappointment as I explained that there was no way we could afford that house. She said, "You told me it was my time. That's my house. God told me. He told me that's my house. That's gonna be my house." Since I am a preacher, I then tried to handle the situation with Scripture. So, I replied, "Baby, the Bible says do not tempt the Lord thy God." Then, she reminded me of a sermon that I had preached a while back, "Tear the Roof Off the Sucker." It was about the account of the four men who carried the paralytic man. They couldn't get to Jesus because of the crowd, so they climbed on top of the house and tore the roof off the sucker! When they went through so much trouble to lower the paralyzed man down into the house, Jesus saw the faith of those men. As the account goes, the Son of God forgave the man's sins and healed him (see Mark 2:3-12).

So, my wife said to me, "Remember that? Remember how you pointed out that he was healed because of the four men's faith who carried him, not the one on the pallet?" I said, "Yeah." She responded, "Then, get on my pallet." There isn't enough room to give you all the details, but trust me, it was quite a journey from that day until we moved in. And I submit to you that we wouldn't be in that nice house today if it wasn't for the faith of my wife. I did not have the faith to believe it (doesn't this prove that pastors really are human!), and the Bible says if you don't have the faith to believe for what you want, you don't get it. Period.

God channeled that blessing to us through my wife. And this is what we realized later on. She had wanted more than anything not to leave our first house. So, we sat there and wrote in our journal that nineteen years ago she had planted the seed for her new house. And nineteen years later the fruit of

the seed she had planted in faith came up. The Bible says in Luke 6:38, *“Give, and it will be given to you. They will pour into your lap a good measure—pressed down, shaken together, and running over. For by your standard of measure it will be measured to you in return.”* So, know that whatever you plant grows to produce more fruit than what you initially planted. The first house that we had could fit into our new home three times over. And I said, “Baby, isn’t that something. God honored nineteen years later what you gave up to serve Him.”

You can’t out-give God. He gave me a prudent wife who brought us the blessing of a new home that otherwise would not have been possible. This is what I mean by doing it God’s way. Proverbs 19:14 became a reality for me; God’s Word will do the same for you when you make up your mind and heart to obey God and line your marriage up with His pattern.

Perfecting One Another

“Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is. And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.”

—1 JOHN 3:2–3

Unfortunately, many marriages have become so self-centered when they should be Christ-centered. It is a habit that reveals a serious lack of growth and spiritual maturity. Marriages in this category breed strife and division that often result in a great deal of drama.

On the other hand, couples who have grown to be mature Christians become transparent, meaning they are not wearing masks that hide underlying ill feelings and discontent. It’s easy to see their sincerity because they’re not trying to cover up any ulterior motives with hidden agendas. So, it is their submission to each other that reveals the love that they nurture and share. This is a beautiful reflection of the pattern of the Trinity. At the end of the day, they can say to each other, “Since your life is transparent to me, I can see Christ in you.” Listen to what Scripture says about this level of spiritual awareness.

“The mystery which has been hidden from the past ages and generations, but has now been manifested to His saints, to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.”

—COLOSSIANS 1:26–27

This is the reason I cannot emphasize enough the importance of keeping Christ in the center of your relationship. It may take some extra work to step out of your flesh and walk in the Spirit, but it is well worth it. And nothing worth having in life ever comes easy. It is worth the effort. Pause for a moment and think about whether you can see your marriage in the following ways. The love of Christ is reflected in those who are able to do these things:

- Submission—submit to each other out of your love for each other and Christ
- Communication—have meaningful conversations knowing that it is important to stay connected to each other
- Partnership—walk hand in hand through life’s ups and downs and avoid breaking apart when trouble comes along

With a focus on Jesus, we see what a pure love relationship looks like. And you need to know that there is enough power in God to help you build a pure relationship. Things may or may not seem so wonderful right now, but He strengthens our hope in the future. And when times are especially rough we might even have to hope in God against all other hope. After all, our number one goal is to be like Him. If Jesus could put aside His deity and become a servant because He loves us (Philippians 2:4–5), then why can’t we be determined to love our mates by putting aside our fleshly ways and following the One that we claim to love?

I’m so glad I have the wife that I have. We are in partnership together; she is my protector, and she’s my perfecter. She can tell when I’ve had a difficult and challenging day. When I go home, she’ll ask me how it went. And I’ll say, “Well, you know, it’s just rough, baby.” Then she’ll rub my shoulders, pull my shoes off, prepare my salad and my salmon, bring it to me, and turn

on the TV. She'll tell me, "This is your favorite program; I won't make you watch the woman's channel today."

She's a wise woman. She sits beside me and comforts me by saying, "I just want to tell you something. You know, I love you. There's nobody who could treat me like you treat me. For thirty-seven years you have cared for me the best that any man could care for a woman. You know what? You're not only the best man in the church—you're the best man in the world. There's no other man that's as good as you are. I mean it. I'm getting tired of hearing you talk about how you don't look good. You look good to me and that's all that matters. You are my Denzel. I love you."

That just pumps me up and makes me want to do better. When she encourages me, I just want to do more. I want to keep it coming. I enjoy going home just so I can get pumped up. After all, where did God take the woman from? The rib. What is a rib? A rib cage is that part of the body which has been designed by God to protect the internal sensitive organs. She's my rib. I'm the head; she's the heart. She is my helper. She completes me. She protects me emotionally. She supplies what I need. She perfects me.

I once saw a movie that illustrates how a woman perfects a man. It is entitled *As Good as It Gets* and stars Jack Nicholson and Helen Hunt. It's a good movie. Jack Nicholson played a paranoid and neurotic character with obsessive-compulsive tendencies. But he exacerbated his problem, as humans tend to do, because he wouldn't take his medication. (Sometimes we can be our own worst enemy.) Then he fell in love with Helen Hunt's character. As they were driving down the street, she told him to give her a compliment even though she knew he didn't like to give compliments. His response to her request was that he had taken his medication that day.

She told him that was not a compliment. He said that it was a compliment because before he met her he didn't care whether he took his medicine or not. But since they had met he had taken his medicine every day so that he could become the best man that he could be for her. That's powerful. He was saying that this woman made him want to take his Prozac. She made him want to be in his right mind. Her presence in his life was working to perfect him by making him do something that was for his betterment but that otherwise he would not do.

Now, as the man, I realize that I have a part in perfecting my wife too.

And my love for her makes me want to do my part. But my desire to honor her ultimately comes out of a longing to please God and to do His will. He provides the impetus for my wanting to be the best husband that I can be. And God, in His infinite wisdom, has interjected the right motivation for husbands to support their wives and to respond positively to their needs. So, when I treat my wife with the dignity that she deserves, God gives me the power to be the spiritual leader of our home. Everything falls in line when I do it God's way. The apostle Peter once offered some very sound advice on this matter:

“Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered.”

—1 PETER 3:7 KJV

It is rather humorous to me that the dynamics between a husband and wife haven't changed much over the span of history. God spoke through Peter's writings long ago and His message still stands today. The inherent differences between the male and female genders have caused many challenges in the marriage relationship. Especially when life throws a curve ball and the two of you disagree on how to handle the situation, it's rather easy to lose your way and for priorities to become confused.

God knows all about it, and He is trying to help us out by saying to the husband, *Deal with your wife according to the intimacy you have acquired by experience*. In other words, experience her. Get to know her. As the leader, this is your responsibility. The verb *dwell* means “to live.” The Scripture is saying to live with your wife according to what you already know about her. This is the way to go about perfecting each other. The more you know about how your mate will react at certain times, the better you can prepare and work to smooth over the rough areas. I strongly encourage husbands to wrap their minds around this instruction from God, meditate on it, ask the Holy Spirit for help in doing it, and determine in your heart to follow it. That is your part in perfecting your wife.

This is how I put it into action. I tell people all of the time that I attend the University of Leslie. There is only one subject, Lesliology. I am ever

matriculating, but never graduating from the University of Leslie. That is my job as her husband. It is similar to what I do as a pastor. I take a passage of Scripture and exegete it, meaning I study the cultural nuances, the grammatical implications, and the historical context. God expects me to treat my wife in that same way. I am supposed to exegete her like a text of Scripture so that I'm in tune with her emotionally, socially, psychologically, and spiritually. As a result of my efforts, I know what makes her tick and I know what ticks her off. It's my job to be her perfecter.

Here is the benefit. Because we are believers in Christ Jesus, God looks at the two of us as heirs together with His Son, Jesus. So, if I do my part, and I do it well, the prayers that I send up to heaven on behalf of my wife and me will not be hindered—they will be heard and answered. God's favor is once again called into play. It is God fulfilling His promises to us.

This is a glorious place to be as we find ourselves in the position of the Trinity: We love together and share our hearts. We live together and share our home. We cling together and share our hopes. We labor together and share our help. We laugh together and share our happiness. We lament together and share our hurts. We remain together and will share our heritage. That is marriage as God intended—a perfect union in the eyes of God. And through it all, we thank God for what He is able to do on our behalf.

Divine GPS

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

—PROVERBS 3:5–6

Let me give you a practical example of relying on God's guidance to get you where He wants you to be in perfecting your mate. You see, God wants to lead you together through life's journey; He doesn't want the two of you to go it alone. Along the way, He wants to help you develop a marriage partnership that looks like His Trinity. At this point, you will have to raise your spiritual antenna and tune in to Him. And hopefully this illustration will begin to sound somewhat familiar to you.

Like many automobile models today, my car has a Global Positioning Satellite (GPS) program. Whenever I need directions, I push the GPS button. I am addressed by name and asked what I need. I announce that I need directions, state where I am, and tell the person where I am trying to go. From that point on, the GPS navigator gives me step-by-step directions. The first time I tried it, I told the guy that I was lost. He stated that I might be lost but he knew exactly where I was because I was hooked into a satellite high above the atmosphere. This man then told me my exact location and proceeded to give me directions. He also assured me that he would stay with me until I reached my destination.

As we proceeded, I was quite surprised by what the navigator was telling me. I asked him how he knew the landmarks and was familiar with areas that I passed by. His answer really made an impact on me. He said that everything was charted before him and he knew exactly where I was at all times. In fact, he could spot my car from anywhere in the world and get me to where I needed to go. Because I was feeling lost, that was extremely comforting news to my ears. And he did just what he said he would do for me.

Before we disconnected, he asked me if I had read my GPS manual. When I confessed that I hadn't, he told me about all the many helpful features that the program offers. I just needed to study it to learn about the various aspects of it. That way I could take advantage of them—weather, time, temperature, sports news—you name it. So later on I took his advice and read my manual. I even found out that the system could hook me up to my computer and receive a fax for me. I'm telling you, knowing this really opened my eyes to some great benefits.

What does this mean to you and your spouse? Many married people don't understand their roles in the way that God has designed them. As a result, their marriage is wandering aimlessly through life. If you feel like you and your spouse are going nowhere fast, you have to make use of the spiritual GPS system that our Lord has provided for you. I'm talking about God's Word and the power of the Holy Spirit working together on your behalf. The Word of God is found in the Bible; it is your Manual of instructions for properly assembling your marriage. When you want to assemble any object, such as a bicycle, for example, you have to read the manual first. Right? Well, it's no different when you want to assemble your marriage in

the proper way. You have to consult with God and surrender yourself to His Spirit to avoid following erroneous directions that won't help you build a sound marriage.

I'm trying to get you to realize that you have a divine hookup. It is the power of God at work in your life. As a believer, you are connected to the Bright and Morning Star, and He's always up above you waiting for you to push the button called prayer. He is God the Son, and you can call Him by His name—Jesus. When you call on Him in prayer, God the Father receives the signal that you need help immediately. He already knows precisely where you are. So, He sends God the Holy Spirit, who, as your Comforter and Helper, is ready to guide you to peace and safety. When you feel lost and don't know how to pray, you have additional assurance because you can rely on the Holy Spirit to pray for you. He knows exactly what you need. He takes the message for you through the satellite beacon of the universe all the way to the throne of grace in heaven.

When you follow Proverbs 3:5–6, the Holy Spirit will assure you that trusting in Him with all your heart is the right thing to do. He reminds you not to rely on your own understanding about your situation, but to acknowledge Him in all of your ways throughout your journey. God knows all about you anyway, so you might as well lay it all before Him—all of your faults, failures, strengths, and weaknesses. That translates to lifting up your daily issues to God and inviting the Lord to show you how to correct your wrong behaviors and reinforce your good qualities.

He assures you that He will direct your paths. He wants you to walk down the straight boulevard because broad is the path that leads to destruction, but narrow is the gate that leads to eternal life. Ultimately, He instructs you to make a divine U-turn and surrender everything over to Him—your family and all of your concerns too—because He will get you to your destination and you can shout the victory.

And the benefits don't stop there. When you search the Manual as you travel along in life, you will find there are a whole lot of promises that you haven't discovered yet. There's healing for you in the Manual. There is the love of God for you to experience in the Manual. There's spiritual and physical prosperity for you in the Manual. There's mercy and forgiveness for you in the Manual. There's peace for you in the Manual. There are opportunities

beyond your imagination for you in the Manual. When you make use of your Manual, you will gain invaluable counsel on receiving blessings that you and your spouse need but didn't know already belonged to you.

When you discover the riches of the Bible, you will better understand the depth of what salvation brings to you as a child of God. Then, perhaps, your response will be like mine. I said, "Man, I like this. I was going in the wrong direction, and the Holy Spirit told me to make a U-turn. He pointed me toward the right path. And when I obeyed Him and made that U-turn, I reached my destination by the grace of God."

So, what are you going to do? Are you and your spouse going to agree to walk this thing out together, or are you going to break out and run from each other? Are you going to break down and quit? Or, by the grace of God, are you going to break through your marital challenges and triumph in the Name of Jesus? I suggest that when the going gets hard, stop and whisper, "Father, I need more grace." I guarantee you will see an immediate and loving response from God that is the answer to your prayer.

All You Need Is Love

*"May the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God
and into the steadfastness of Christ."*

—2 THESSALONIANS 3:5

It is a simple prayer but it is so rich in meaning because it is the very heart and soul of your relationship. You and your spouse need each other's love to be perfected in each other and when you rely on the Lord Jesus Christ, He will get you there. When you break through all the clutter and distractions that often burden married life, what you have at the end of the day is each other. It's no wonder that God would design the husband and the wife to meet each other's needs. And He is the faithful One who will always watch over you. Living together can be a hard road to travel and you need to be steadfast and dedicated; otherwise you will give up. Jesus wants to be the Director of your heart, and you can be assured that He will teach you how to love and show you how to build up and perfect your marriage in Him.

The Bible commands husbands in Ephesians 5:25 to love their wives. That is the primary need of the woman—love. This verse was written in the imperative mood of the Greek language, and, therefore, it is a command and not merely an option for men to love their wives. The apostle Paul wanted to make sure that the husbands knew that their duty was to meet the needs of their wives in every way that is humanly possible. When you are seriously committed to doing that, the question to constantly ask your wife is, “Do you need anything?”

On the other hand, it is interesting to note that nowhere in Scripture is there a command for the wife to love her husband. Now, Titus 2:4–5 speaks to women and strongly encourages them to love their husbands and children and to exhibit behavior that is proper for women in general. However, that is not a command to women; rather it is an exhortation for them to make sure their behavior was a model for their community and brought honor to God. It was not written as an imperative for women to love their husbands; it is really saying that it’s the right thing to do.

Since God has given us His love, it is the strength and power of His love that helps us to perfect each other. But there is a stark difference in how He designed men and women to show their love. Women express love by *nature*, and men demonstrate love by *nurture*. God made women to naturally show love by the loving nature that is inherent in them. For instance, the natural bond between a woman and her child will cause a woman to love that child without reservation because her spirit is open and receptive to the transference of her love. Conversely, men were designed to put their love into action through physical ways. For example, doing such things to benefit their families like teaching a child how to play baseball or working to provide food and other necessities is a concrete form of love that they can relate to. These are the characteristics of a nurturer. That is why men need a special commandment from God to express their love in the many subtle ways that appeal to their wives.

Here are seven basic ways that a woman needs her husband to demonstrate his love. So, brothers, pay close attention to the following list. It will help you to understand how you are to perfect your wife:

1. Love and affection

What's love got to do with it? Love has everything to do with a woman's makeup and motivation. She is either driven by love or the lack of it. That is why God created the woman to be loved by her husband. When a man understands that his wife shares a part of his own flesh, he should be compelled to love her as much as he loves his own self. Paul explains it this way, "*So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself; for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also does the church*" (Ephesians 5:28–29).

Although this may seem like a sacrifice for you, know that a woman who is given sufficient love will not reject that love; rather, she will be naturally motivated to embrace it. When you are sincerely meeting a woman's primary need for love, she will feel an overall sense of security in that love. If your love is motivated by God, she will know it, and it will be reflected in the climate of your relationship. Genuine love will satisfy all of her other needs.

2. Spiritual leadership

God gave the man His word in Genesis 2:16. So, by default, the husband is the spiritual leader of the home. As the patriarch of the family, it is the man's responsibility to make sure the family goes to church, attends Bible study, has regular devotion time, and prays together regularly. It is his duty to point out the difference between right and wrong and make sure that his children choose righteousness. As she supports him in these efforts, a woman needs to know that she can rely on her husband to provide spiritual direction for her and her family.

Overall, she needs her husband to assume his role in being the head of the family and leading by example. Otherwise, the family structure is out of order and the pressure is upon the woman to make up for his lack of responsibility. She may feel constrained to take it upon herself to keep her family grounded in the Word. But know that this could become a distraction from giving her full attention to her own responsibilities as a wife and mother.

3. Conversation and quality time

Although there is much debate over the subject of men and women and the number of words each gender uses daily, it is commonly noted that men engage in conversation considerably less than women. According to neuropsychiatrist Louann Brizendine, “The numbers vary, but on average girls speak two to three times more words per day than boys.”¹

When you have to discuss typical family matters such as children, food, school, television, sports, and even sex, it helps to communicate effectively with your mate about these things. Otherwise, misunderstanding one another can often cause serious problems. Having a good perspective on this subject, Dr. Brizendine also states: “We’ve learned that men and women have different brain sensitivities to stress and conflict. They use different brain areas and circuits to solve problems, process language, experience and store the same strong emotions.”²

As a result, it is beneficial to be in harmony with each other’s various modes of communication as much as possible. A husband who can be in tune with how his wife thinks and can anticipate her needs will have a more successful conversation. Brothers, whether you are in the mood for talking or not when your wife approaches you, this would probably be a good time to press on and give her your undivided attention. Let her know verbally and through your body language that you are interested in what she wants to convey. Talk to her; tell her that you love her, and remind her of how important she is to you over and over again. Some loving cooperation can go a long way when you dwell with your mate according to what you already know about her communication habits.

4. Financial support and stability

Now, think about this very carefully. A couple recites their marriage vows and promises to remain together in times of sickness and health, for richer or poorer, and for better or worse. But, trust me, even though a woman may have said these things, she wasn’t anticipating the part about being poor. No one wants to be poor, and she doesn’t expect to be deprived

because of financial constraints. She didn't marry you with the belief that you could not provide a stable home and future for her.

I guarantee you that a lack of financial planning on your part was not in her perceived future. Instead, most women look on the positive side and believe that their spouse is prepared to take good care of the family that you plan on building together. In fact, when the apostle Peter used the phrase *giving honor to the wife* in 1 Peter 3:7 (NKJV), what he was saying is that the wife is worthy of money. The word *honor* in this verse is *timdao*, which is where we get our word *tomato*. In the Greek language this word means "money." In other words, Peter is reminding husbands that their wives are valuable and should be treated as such.

5. To be number one in her husband's life

A wife needs to know that she is cherished and that her husband delights in her. In fact, there is no stronger human bond than that between a husband and wife. She should have her husband's constant attention—even when they are apart. She needs you to stay in contact with her; call her several times a day just to tell her that you love her. It is the husband's duty, I repeat—duty, to make sure that his wife knows beyond a shadow of a doubt that he puts no other human being above her. He does this through his actions, by giving her his time, talk, tenderness, and touch to the point that she gets it. Because he is consistently showing her in various ways, she understands that she is loved by him and holds a place of prominence in his heart.

6. Protection

Men mostly think in terms of providing physical protection for their wives. But there are other areas where a woman needs protection, particularly in her times of weakness. You are also supposed to reassure her and make her feel safe when she feels intimidated and vulnerable. What about emotional, social, intellectual, and financial protection? All of these areas are important to a woman. For example, if a man is not a good steward of his money, then his wife does not feel protected and her sense of security is affected. When that happens, a common reaction is for a woman to find

ways to protect her own interests by building her own savings. But in a marriage relationship, there isn't supposed to be his and her accounts. However, if she feels that he can't handle his business, her natural instinct is to insulate herself from the threat of financial lack. That is the beginning of a separation and a rift in the bond between them. A lack of protection on his part can manifest itself in many ways and can become a slippery slope as one act of division often leads to another.

7. Family commitment

A woman needs to know that she can trust her husband to create a safe and secure environment for her family. She needs a mate whom she can depend on to be a good father to her children. The best thing a man can do for his children is to love their mother. She will cherish the stability that you provide, knowing that you are fully invested in your family. She can rise to do her best when there is a shared sense of values that is fostered by your loyalty and dedication to your family.

Brothers, I am telling you that this thing is powerful. Please take ministering to your wife's needs into serious consideration. You have to pay attention to the well-being of your wife. She is your most valuable asset. Understand that you can't expect to have a summer wife when you bring home winter weather. That's impossible; it just doesn't work that way. Remember, you are the thermostat. If you bring coldness or harsh feelings into your home, you will get that in return. It is your responsibility to set the climate in your household. You are the key to the success of the home. Try repeating this over and over to yourself: I'm the man. I'm the man. I'm the man.

Protect Your Partnership

Brothers, when you are determined to make your marriage a success, these issues will matter greatly to you. But you need help. It's time to turn once again to the Bible to find out what God says that you should do. The more you invest in your relationship, the better results you will enjoy. A sound marriage is based on mutual love—it is the backbone on which your

relationship is built. And love demands respect. The part of the Bible that has the most to say about the subject of love is what I call the love chapter: 1 Corinthians 13:4–8. You will gain an insurmountable advantage in your marriage when you take my summary of this message to heart and put it into action in your marriage partnership.

Love is patient and kind. When you get this, you will not be in a hurry for everything to happen all at once. You won't have a perfect marriage overnight, but you will realize that love covers a multitude of sins. Real love does not get envious of its partner. Love doesn't belittle its spouse and have an attitude that tells the world that you think you're "all that." Love is not selfish; it doesn't demand that everything goes its way. Love doesn't have a temper that flares up at a moment's notice.

Love doesn't want to see his or her mate stumble and fall and then gloat about it. Love never exposes the frailties and weakness of its mate. Rather, love will make you support your mate and protect the love you share. Love gets happy when it witnesses the truth prevailing over lies and deception. Love can hold up under pressure and doesn't buckle under when times get rough. Love is always willing to give the benefit of the doubt and stays ready to believe the best of each other.

Love will endure whatever the marriage encounters in life. Love will always hope for the best outcome in any situation. Finally, those who believe God's Word also know that you can't go wrong when you choose to follow love's prescription for life. And love will never fail them.

Winning the Ultimate Battle

Yes, love can hold your marriage together, but there are some times that marriage will hold your love together. Furthermore, married people who love the Lord should want to do everything that they can to avoid the pitfalls in marriage that could lead to destruction. When you both understand it is God whom you must ultimately please and you then work to develop His character in you, your marriage will reap the benefits. That's when it will begin to look like the Trinity.

Someone once said that you can view marriage as having three rings. First comes the engagement ring, next comes the wedding ring, and then

comes the suffering. The bottom line is that certain attitudes and behaviors work against your partnership. If your marriage has fallen on bad times, take a closer look to understand why. Marriages don't deteriorate in one day; rather, relationships tend to break down in six phases. Everybody needs a checkup once in a while. To avoid winding up in a trap that could potentially lead to its demise, evaluate the phases where your marriage could be in jeopardy.

The Bible speaks about God's people being destroyed because they lack knowledge. If you see you and your mate in any of these phases, or if you sense that the climate of your marriage is reflected here, it's time to do something about it. Taking action to protect your marriage is the goal, and procrastination can only make things worse. To win the battle for your marriage, you first need to know about the signs to be aware of.

Phase 1

The Spiritual Phase. The health of a marriage deteriorates in the spiritual realm first. It occurs because of a failure to keep Christ and His Word at the center of the relationship. That is the first mistake many people make. Too many times we focus on the two flesh and blood partners in the marriage and leave the most important component out. There is no way that a marriage can fail with Jesus Christ as its focal point. When a couple is focusing on Jesus they will be in tune with His Spirit. And He will keep them in tune with each other. So, the tie that binds it all together is Christ.

Therefore, the key to the success of a marriage is submission to Christ first and then to each other. The Bible says that a threefold cord is not easily broken (Ecclesiastes 4:12). And so it is Christ, your mate, and you—because you can't maintain a strong marriage without Christ as the equalizing factor in your relationship. I use the example of a clear plastic glove to represent believers in a relationship with God. That relationship makes their lives transparent. If I placed my hand inside the glove, you could plainly see my brown hand, which represents a believer being filled with Christ. This is a picture of what we need in our marital relationships: two individuals so filled with the love of Christ that it's all they see when they look at each other.

Here's why. We can't pick and choose what we want God to be involved in and expect to have strong marriages. There should be nothing in the relationship that we should be reluctant to bring God into. If people would seek God before their problems arise in the way that they do when they seek God after their problems occur, generally they wouldn't have to seek God with any problems. But the problem is that we use God like a spare tire. We mess the marriage up, and then we want God to fix it up. The wonderful thing about the grace of God is that He will do it. He will fix a broken relationship if you give Him all of the pieces. He absolutely will. But God wants us to understand that, to reach the goal of functioning like the Trinity, we must be committed to Him before the marriage and committed to Him in the marriage.

Singles often ask me how they can know that a certain person is the one they are supposed to hook up with. My response is: Start running for Jesus and run as fast as you can. When you look over and see somebody that is also running for Jesus and keeping up with you, that's your spouse. You'll be in a better position to build a strong marriage when the two of you keep Christ at the center of your relationship.

Phase 2

The Reality Phase. After the marriage ceremony is over and the honeymoon soon becomes a fond but distant memory, the reality of being married begins to settle in. What does the word *honeymoon* mean? It means "sweet month." It is temporary, and when it's over you actually begin to see the person that you've married. Then, you start to realize what living with that person will be like for the rest of your life. You don't really see it when you are dating or even when you are engaged. This is the phase where those things that you thought were cute about each other while dating now get on your nerves as you realize you have to deal with it on a permanent basis.

When people don't take the time to build a strong relationship by getting to know each other before they plan a wedding, they only know what they've got once they have the papers. That's when you find out that he's not who you thought he was. You find out that his breath stinks at 6:00 a.m. and his feet stink at 6:00 p.m. You find out that she isn't all that you thought

that she was. She's not Sleeping Beauty; she just doesn't want to get up out of bed.

My suggestion is, if you haven't already done so, the first thing is to begin a serious prayer time. You're going to need it to get you through some difficult situations. It takes commitment to God's Word and determination to make your marriage survive. And for that you will need to lean heavily on your communication with the Lord to help you make the adjustment to married life.

Phase 3

The Transition Phase. The problem with a lot of marriages is that some married people don't realize that they are married. They're still trying to live like they're single. NEWS FLASH: You're not single anymore. In too many marriages people are living single but they are actually married with children. Hmmm . . . sounds like good titles for TV programs. They haven't learned that there is a transition that has to take place. Some brothers talk back to their wives saying, "You're not my mama, I don't have to check in with you." I beg to differ with you. You owe her an explanation because you are married to her. To the women who say, "I can spend what I want to because I have my own job," I beg to differ: You are married to him; it's no longer your money. Money is an asset that two married partners are supposed to share.

You don't get to do what *you* want to do anymore. All of those wrong attitudes have to be changed when you are married. The two of you are now "one", and you have to learn how to live like it. Single life is over. Yes, you should know who his friends are because he is your husband. Yes, you need to know where she's going because she is your wife. Where you spend your money and what you spend it on becomes the business of both of you.

When your plans cater only to your personal needs, it will cause detrimental results to your relationship. It's a sign of immaturity when you think that your marriage is all about you. There are some newlywed couples who are prone to saying really immature things like, "I want her to work because she has to hold up her end. It's fifty-fifty." I just want to know what Bible they've been reading. Marriage is not fifty-fifty. If that were so, where do

you draw the line? How would you know when you've done your 50 percent? No, marriage is 100 percent. It is not give and take like a business proposition. Marriage is give, give, give, give . . .

Phase 4

The Romantic Phase. This phase is in jeopardy when the couple's talk, time, touch, and tenderness have diminished. It happens when they become insensitive to each other's needs, including the area of sexual intimacy. In fact, intimacy is very important. In my marriage seminars, I utilize a survey that covers twelve aspects of intimacy. It is designed to be completed by both the husband and wife separately. It encourages them to talk and share with each other. They are to come together to compare their answers and discuss the areas in which they disagree. They are to break down the reasons they think the various aspects of intimacy are working or not working in their relationship.

To get the most out of this exercise, the couple is supposed to really roll up their sleeves and commit to finding resolutions for their areas of weakness. Then an action plan is used to target a particular problem in the marriage; the couple is to evaluate the ideas that are suggested for improvement and thoroughly exhaust each one until they reach a solution. The idea is to help your marriage survive by putting forth the effort to restore romance in your relationship. It may take some hard work to turn your marriage into the loving relationship God would have it to be. But the good news is on the way when you take each other's suggestions and intimacy comes alive!

Phase 5

The Retaliation Phase. This is when the proverbial "war of the roses" takes place. Instead of living like June and Ward Cleaver, the couple lives like Homer and Marge Simpson. Or, worse yet, Al and Peggy Bundy. Resentment and bitterness have set in, and the couple begins to damage each other intentionally. It starts with a breakdown in communication when you begin to talk *at* each other and *about* each other instead of talking *with* each other. Spouses start to retaliate by saying things that undermine the relationship. They find them-

selves having bitters feelings and start to shut down in opposition.

If the situation escalates, couples start to get even against each other. Often they end up being very vulnerable and open to having affairs. If you're constantly telling him what a dog he is and he can't do anything right, somebody at work may be telling him that he's the sweetest person they've every met. When other women compliment him on his personality, he will begin to think that his wife doesn't appreciate him. Or, when a woman feels like her husband doesn't appreciate her and frequently reminds her that she is overweight and out of shape, someone else might tell her that she is a soft and cuddly pillow that he would love to lay his head on. My point is that people can find themselves being swayed by outside attention when they grow weary of verbal and emotional battles with their spouses.

Phase 6

The Rejection Phase. Extramarital affairs often occur when a marriage is broken. If a spouse has resorted to having an affair, it is a form of serious rejection. Separation or divorce can be an unfortunate result.

Negative communication then becomes a key factor in the fall of any marriage. It all starts with words. Words are powerful and once they have been spoken, there is no taking them back. Certain words are extremely detrimental and can undermine a person's self-esteem. And causing harm is exactly what they are meant to do.

The Bible says that "death and life are in the power of the tongue" (Proverbs 18:21). Knowing this led me to rethink that old phrase, "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never harm me." That is a false statement, which I have reworded to state the truth: "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words can break my heart." Words are powerful; they can break your heart. Words will destroy your relationship. No matter how tough someone might think they are, people cannot continue to be rejected without it taking a toll on them emotionally.

For instance, a wife may say to her husband, "Honey, I was thinking that I want a business of my own." She starts to describe the kind of business she might envision when her husband interrupts and says, "That's the stupidest thing I've ever heard in my life." Well, you can forget about

hearing her dreams again. Or, a husband might tell his wife, “Baby, I’m thinking about going back to school to get a degree in engineering.” If her reply is, “What? You? . . .” That dream just died.

The point is that harsh and insensitive words can kill a marriage by sabotaging the partners. The bottom line is, no one is happy when a marriage fails. There is no winner; everyone loses something because a spiritual separation breaches God’s reason for marriage. But do not dismay; God has a prescription for keeping marriages together that will hopefully bring some illumination to your situation.

It’s All Connected . . .

Brothers, this discussion is mostly for you. Don’t think that I’m picking on you. I’m not the designer of the marital relationship. However, as a fellow brother, I want you to be aware because your marriage is serious business to God. Remember, it was God’s idea to create the man first and give him primary responsibility for the health and well-being of the marriage bond. As a result, in our pursuit of perfecting the marriage relationship so that it lines up with the Trinity, there is an underlying theme and a connection that I will explain here because God doesn’t want us to miss this.

Without the power of God working behind the scenes, we don’t have the right equipment and, therefore, no chance to realize God’s vision for the union of marriage. However, God is the author of matrimony and marital relationships, and He really wants you and your spouse to succeed. If you’ve been thinking all along that God is indifferent to your situation, think that no longer. He is both able and willing to help your marriage realize its full potential.

This is what you need to know. I often say that we don’t have a relationship problem, we have a “filled with the Spirit” problem. When we cooperate with Him, the Holy Spirit produces fruit in our lives. It is no secret: If you practice love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control, you and your mate are on your way to victory in your marriage. And when you depend on God’s power He will develop His fruit in you. That is a sweet path to take that brings about good results. My friend Brother Davis responded to his wife in a sensitive way once she allowed God’s fruit to come forth and be a blessing in their relationship. Love,

gentleness, and self-control were already there, someone just needed to point out to her that she was overlooking the powerful change that would take place for her and Brother Davis when she relied on them.

Here is the prescription for perfecting our marriages. Test it and see for yourself. Particularly in my own experience, with the chronic health problems that my wife faces, sometimes there can be enormous pressure to deal with. This is a major area in my life where the Holy Spirit benefits me immensely. I rely on the fruit of God's Spirit to help me deal with the challenges of caring for my wife and all other family concerns, along with the demands of being a pastor. After all, God's wisdom and power supersede anything we could accomplish on our own. When you think about your own relationship, what situation comes to mind first? What do you want the Lord to work with you on so that the problem will be fixed?

But before you can expect God to help you unravel the difficult things that put a strain on your relationship, you have a choice to make. You must decide whether to choose the path of unrighteous or follow God's way. This matters greatly to your marriage because it determines whose influence you will follow. Take a self-examination moment and consider the two contrasting descriptions that the apostle lays out here. Which camp best describes your behavior?

“Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.”

—GALATIANS 5:19–25

This Scripture passage is drawing a stark distinction between the only two paths to follow in life. One is narrow and the other is wide. One leads to destruction and the other leads to eternal life. The wide path seems easier to follow because there is so much room to maneuver about. But the problem is that we wind up indulging in our fleshly desires. Everyone has them; the question is, “Do you take the easy way out and give in to whatever your flesh wants you to do?” Just look at the long list detailing the deeds of the flesh. Anybody who has lived on this earth for a while should know that it doesn’t take any power to give in to sin. That’s the easy way.

On the other hand, when you take the narrow path, your life will produce good fruit. When you got saved, Jesus’ work prepared you to live in heaven, but when you got filled with the Spirit, He prepared you to live on earth. You have the power to choose. The Holy Spirit gives you the ability to embrace the things of God so that you can live like the child of God that you are. The Word of God promises that you can crucify your fleshly passions when you belong to Christ. That’s not an empty promise—it’s the truth.

Walking the narrow path changes everything from unrighteousness to righteousness. When you are a child of God, you have a new life, a new chance to live right. He just wants to help you acknowledge the truth about yourself, give up your old ways of immorality, angry and abusive behavior, whatever it may be; acknowledge that truth about yourself; and begin to walk joy, peace, and goodness in your daily life. In other words, if you know that you are a child of God—then act like it. Put yourself on a steady diet of God’s Word and be determined to obey God.

You see, the devil would have you be ignorant to who you really are. He wants your flesh to dominate your behavior instead of allowing the Holy Spirit to guide your actions. He wants to lure you into thinking that, in the big picture of life, your place in this world is virtually insignificant. But that is not so. The cause and effect that you generate through your personal choices matter even into eternity. Life is a series of connected events that affect everyone and everything else in your sphere of influence. The people around you are watching you. And, although you may not readily see it happening, the way that you conduct yourself and the climate you set in your marriage then spreads beyond your immediate boundaries and touches others in ways that may be difficult to imagine—yet, they are very real.

So, that is what the fruit of the Spirit is for—it is the power in your relationship that keeps your connection to God strong. Think about the benefits it will bring if you tap into the abundance of love and affection that may be lying dormant in your heart. When you allow the love of God inside you to bubble up, it will help you to be patient and kind toward your loved ones and everyone else that you meet. You will remain faithful to God, your wife, and yourself when you demonstrate the fruit of self-control. When the Holy Spirit directs your life, you will be able to live in the peace of God.

To illustrate what I'm talking about, I want you to read on to see the dramatic impact that a man has on his marital relationship and even the world when he chooses to live without the Spirit of God. Then, you will also see the outcome a man will bring about when he chooses to walk in the Spirit of God and allow the fruit of God's Spirit to work in and through him.

Here is a summary of what Dr. Tony Evans says about the significance of a man's role and the impact it has on the world: If you've got a messed up man, you have a messed up marriage. If you have a messed up marriage, you have a messed up family. If you have a messed up family, then you'll have a messed up church because families make up churches. If you have a messed up church, you have a messed up city because it's churches that comprise a city. That's a problem because the church is the thermostat in the world. If we have a messed up city, then you have a messed up state because states are comprised of cities. If you have a messed up state, you have a messed up country because countries are comprised of states. If you have a messed up country, you have a messed up continent because continents are comprised of countries. If you have a messed up continent, then you have a messed up world because the world is comprised of continents. And so, "*Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a disgrace to any people*" (Proverbs 14:34).

So then, the reverse is also true, and this is where we need to focus our efforts. We can't afford to miss this. If you want a better world, then you've got to have better continents. And if you want better continents, then you've got to have better nations. But the only way you can get better nations is if you have better states. But the only way to get to better states is to have better cities. And the only way to get better cities is to have better churches because they are filled with people who love God. And the only way you can

have better churches is to have better families. And the only way to get better families is to have better marriages. And the only way to get a better marriage is to have a better man.³

To build a better marriage, you've got to go back to basics. Remember, this thing starts with the man because God started with the man. But it's up to the man and whether he chooses to master his God-given role. If you want to get it right, brothers, you have to follow His pattern. When the thermostat (the man) and the thermometer (the woman) register at the right temperature for your marriage, everything that concerns your relationship is given the opportunity to fall in line.

Now, let me warn you, it won't be perfect, because there's no such thing as a perfect marriage. Yet, our goal is to mirror the Trinity. Even as we strive to do that, we are still human and as such we have flaws. God knows this but He expects us to do nothing less than our very best because He has given us His best. The sum of perfection in our present human state is manifested when we *"press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus"* (Philippians 3:14 KJV). When we press on, we find perfection in Him.

God is calling men and women to take their roles in perfecting their partnership seriously because He is seriously looking for His children to be a reflection of His Trinity. And when you have the kind of relationship that God has in mind, you are connected to God's Trinity. That puts you in the position to enjoy marriage and your family as God intended. And your ultimate reward will be waiting for you in heaven. Trust Him, it's all worth fighting for.

Making It Happen

1. With an open and receptive heart, ask God to help you understand how to apply His reason for creating marriage as a means to perfect your marriage partnership. He will hear your sincere prayers and help you to transform your marriage into a reflection of His image.

2. Married couples need to spend quality time together doing things that they both enjoy. However, this area of the relationship is often shortchanged because of the demands of day-to-day life. Choose something that you will both enjoy. Putting forth the effort is well worth it because this can be valuable time that has the ability to bring a husband and wife closer together. Although there are some who do, many women don't consider watching a football game or other sports programs as spending quality time with their mate. If your wife happens to be someone who is not interested in sports, it's not fair for you to expect her to enjoy watching a game with you.
3. To facilitate your desire to improve your relationship, it would be helpful to view the Word of God as an instruction Manual that will lead to blessings and favor when you do what it says. The fruit of the Spirit is *love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control*. Before your next scheduled quality time, list three ways that you have observed your spouse demonstrating each fruit of the Spirit. Share your list with each other.
4. For your marriage to really work and to please God, you have to reach the point that you both embrace your God-given roles as husband and wife and, by the grace and mercy of God, live them. Why do you think God decided to give each partner different roles to play in marriage? What can you do as your wife's partner to improve your performance? What can you do as your husband's partner to improve your performance?
5. In your own words, what do you think it means to perfect your mate? What are some of the things a man should do to perfect his mate? What are some of the things a woman should do to perfect her mate? Name some ways that you plan to improve yourself and become a better spouse.
6. How does your partnership measure up? What things can you do to make it better? Keep this simple question in mind and ask your mate

often, “Do you need anything?” Making this a practice will put you both in a mind-set of meeting each other’s needs and knowing that your primary concern is taking care of each other.

7. Do you believe marriage partners should be transparent to each other? You will see the Trinity at work when you look at each other up close and personal. It is completely possible because God has made it so. Jesus said it best, “*The things which are impossible with men are possible with God*” (Luke 18:27 KJV). Have a meaningful conversation about this question and share with each other qualities that you appreciate in your partner. Include as many intimate details as you can.
8. Effective communication is one of the greatest assets a couple can possess. Discuss the seven basic ways that a husband should demonstrate his role as the protector of his wife. Have a similar discussion about the wife’s role as protector of her husband.
9. To win the battle for your marriage, discuss each phase of marriage breakdown. Identify areas where you are having difficulty and focus on ways to strengthen your relationship.
10. A woman needs her husband’s undivided attention on a consistent basis. So, the two of you need to find an activity where both of you are fully engaged. Show her that you enjoy being with her. Marriage is all about compromise and this is an option that should not be overlooked as you choose how to spend time together. The time spent is significant only when both of you find enjoyment in your shared time.

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