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Reason #1

The Pattern *of the* Trinity

*Reveals a
Spiritual Reality*

Almost two years ago, in a quiet moment, my wife looked at me through her pain and tear-filled eyes and said, “I know you are tired of having to do everything without my aid and assistance. I know you are tired of not being able to enjoy the things that most husbands enjoy, like coming home to a cooked meal and a clean house instead of having to come home and cook the meal and clean the house yourself. You have been taking care of me for sixteen years without much help and without much of a break. Besides that, you have also been taking care of my mother with her Alzheimer’s disease.

“Sometimes I really feel bad that I cannot help you more. I long for the days when I was whole and able to take care of my man and my home. I am tired of me being sick and I know you are tired of me being sick too. I know you are ready to leave me and give up on our marriage. At least I feel like that is what you probably want to do.”

At that moment, she was making a reference to her sixteen years of debilitating illness that includes four nervous breakdowns, three major surgeries, five minor surgeries, complications from Type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, chronic back pain, and severe migraine headaches,

which have generally ended up with us at the hospital so that she could get a shot for relief from the insufferable pain. These excruciating setbacks have rendered her virtually unable to perform even the most simple of tasks.

By God's grace, for the past eighteen years now I have had to do all of the shopping, all of the washing, most of the cleaning of the house, and the cooking, among other things. As I reflected upon the faithfulness of the Lord Jesus Christ, He showed me that my greatest problem in my marriage was not with my wife but with me. I thought about how He has taught me that in order for my marriage to be successful, like Him, I have to die to self.

With those thoughts in mind, I gingerly took her hand in mine and stroked it as I lovingly gazed into her pretty brown eyes and said, "I love you and I have loved you from the first day I met you. Do you remember that I told you on that first day that I would marry you even though you were only eight years old and couldn't spell the word *marriage*? The Lord has matured me to the point in our marriage that even though I may get tired *in* serving you, I don't get tired *of* serving you because I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. So, even if you never get better I have already decided to take care of you for the rest of my days. I am not saying that I haven't had struggles. I am saying that sometimes I too wish that you were fully restored and things were like they were prior to your getting sick. But long ago the Lord taught me that marriage was not about finding the right person but about being the right person.

"He has enabled me to love you as much in your sickness as I have loved you in your good health. All glory goes to Him! And besides I always tell you that I am so committed to you that if you ever leave me, I am going with you. I know that a successful marriage is one that is able to weather the fiercest storms of life."

Tears now were freely flowing from both of our eyes as I drew her close to me in a warm embrace and softly kissed her lips and reaffirmed my love for her. She fell asleep in my arms and I thanked the Lord Jesus for His sustaining strength and for teaching me how to utilize the first principle of marriage—the pattern of the Trinity.

A Spiritual Foundation for Marriage

The Trinity of God is a spiritual family based on a divine relationship. Since it is God's intention that the marriage relationship reflects His relationship with Himself, it is crucial to our success that we line up with God and keep Him at the center of our marital relationships. There is only one way that we can achieve this goal. A godly marriage that is grounded in the Lord must have a spiritual foundation.

As I tried to console my wife and ease her concerns, I asked her, "How often have you heard me preach from the pulpit that, in the spiritual sense, I am a wife because I am part of the church, the bride of Christ? But, in the natural realm, I am a husband married to you, Leslie Ford, my loving wife. But if I am to love you in the way in which God desires for me to love you, I must first submit in the spiritual to my Husband, the Lord Jesus Christ. He cares for me as I submit myself to Him. Then I step off into the natural, and what my Husband in the spiritual does for me as His wife, I do the same for you. If I'm going to be a successful husband in the natural I must first submit to my Husband in the spiritual, the Lord Jesus Christ. Everything that He does for me in the spiritual, I step off in the natural and, by His power, do that for you. So, if I were to fail as a husband in the natural it would be because I first was a failure as a wife to the Lord Jesus Christ in the spiritual. This is how I am able to care for you in the way that God intends for me to do."

I have no doubt that God intends marriage to follow the pattern of the Trinity because my own marriage has proven to be a reflection of the essence of biblical truth: "*Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her*" (Ephesians 5:25). Brothers, know that this is very real. The God of the universe is saying to you: when you become a husband, loving your wife unconditionally is not simply an option—it's a necessity.

Once vows are exchanged, it is the same for every married couple. In a traditional marriage ceremony, we present a ring to our betrothed. When a man puts a ring on his wife-to-be, he is saying that it is a symbol of his love and commitment to her. It is a symbol of protection that is supposed to make her feel secure as she is encircled with the love and protection of her

mate. The ring is made of a precious metal that is to give a foretaste of what the man's provision will be. He wants her to know that he will take good care of her. When he places the ring on her finger, she wears it in open display. The man is saying to her that he will always display her as his glory in that same way.

Another good example is found in a traditional Jewish wedding ceremony. The husband makes a solemn commitment to his wife by removing his outer tunic and putting it around her. He is saying to her, from that point on, she will never be naked or cold. She then accepts this gesture by wearing the coat throughout the rest of the ceremony.

What better way to begin a marriage than with a covenant agreement that expresses the depth of your love and a desire to care for each other. However, it's after the ceremony when it's "put up or shut up" time that your covenant agreement has to be backed up with some serious action from both partners. What I'm saying is, you can't just go through the motions; you have to live it out through the good times and the bad times. As I have shared from my personal experience, I am not telling you something I do not know firsthand.

Allow me to reiterate that if a man is not a good husband in the natural, it is because he is not a good wife in the spiritual. It's all about your relationship with Christ that positions you to receive the goodness of God and then transfer that goodness to your marital relationship. Brothers, this one is exclusively for you. Remember what Scripture says: "*He who loves his own wife loves himself.*" If you want to get better as a husband in the natural, then hook up with Jesus in the spiritual and He will help you put your marriage in order.

There are some practical things that you can do. For your marriage to work, you must follow the Guidebook, that is, the Word of God. If you are not already doing so, I strongly recommend that you join a consistent Bible study group particularly designed for married couples. Christian marriage counseling can also be an effective means in helping to sort through the typical day-to-day issues that arise in married life as well as offering assistance in working through major problems. You must also develop a consistent prayer life because sincere prayer can only serve to improve your situation. As a married couple, these are the tools that will help you line up

with God's Word. The essence of Christ will start to fill your spirit, soul, and body, and you will begin to see His influence in each other. When you are able to see Christ in your mate, it will help you to realize that submitting to each other in love is possible just as you are learning how to submit to Christ.

Prayer Holds the Key

It is not too difficult to understand why we don't get this. But it is truly a shame that many Christian couples do not even pray together on a regular basis. Spending time together communicating with God is necessary to keep your marriage healthy and stable. If asked the question whether you and your mate have a daily prayer time, would you be embarrassed to answer? Part of the problem is, too many couples don't even have meaningful conversations with each other. So, let me suggest that you turn off the TV so that the two of you can begin a routine practice of talking to God together. It would even make it easier for you to talk to each other. Try it, you might like it. And know that God will be there to join in with you whenever you're ready.

You see, when you invite God in as a partner in your marriage, you do so through prayer and obedience. Prayer is what holds us together. In fact, it can be the difference between staying together and improving your marriage or getting a divorce. A poll on "Couples Who Pray" taken by Baylor University and George Gallup compared those who "pray a lot" with their spouse versus those who pray "sometimes." The results were as follows: 78 percent vs. 60 percent say their marriage is happy; 91 percent vs. 74 percent say their spouse is their best friend; 75 percent vs. 64 percent agree on how to raise their kids; 60 percent vs. 58 percent agree on finances; and 72 percent vs. 52 percent say the quantity and quality of their love is good.¹

Sincere and consistent prayer can be an effective prevention method to steer a failing marriage toward reconciliation. Why? Because God honors the earnest prayers of His people. James, the apostle, understood this principle. He encouraged the believers to pray because "*The effective prayer of a righteous man [or woman] can accomplish much*" (James 5:16).

Now, I realize that a commitment to pray faithfully as a couple united

in love can't be a "one size fits all" approach. You and your spouse have to agree on the proper time and manner in which to come together in prayer. However it works for you is best. But with the divorce rate today being one in every two, the point is that it is important to be determined to make your marital relationship the strongest it can be. And simple but heartfelt prayer can go a long way.

My wife and I make it a practice to pray together on a regular basis. I can readily attest to the fact that it's very difficult to pray together and still be angry with each other. At the same time, we try to obey Ephesians 4:26–27: "*Be angry, and yet do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not give the devil an opportunity.*" To keep from giving the enemy a chance to destroy what we have built together, we attempt to find resolution to our problems before going to bed. Generally, we're able by God's grace to resolve an issue in this way even though sometimes we've had to stay up for five days in order to obey the Scriptures. Seriously, though, my wife and I pray together almost every day and have a devotional time together two to three times each week. As we have tried to follow His lead, God has used our efforts to strengthen our marriage relationship tremendously.

Food for Thought:

- To combat the challenges and obstacles that face married couples today, you will have to take some other deliberate steps toward keeping your marriage alive and well. Spending quality time together is the best way to create a deep sense of belonging and intimacy. When is the last time you and your mate went to bed at the same time? Many couples are missing out on chances for building intimacy by not going to bed at the same time (and I'm not talking about solely for the purpose of having sex, although that's also good).
- Do you and your spouse have a regular date day? This is a time you set aside to be together—with no children and no in-laws—nobody but you and your spouse. To counteract the pressures and strains of day-to-day life, do something that you both enjoy, and do it often. Lord knows there are enough difficulties that you must face as the two of

you overcome the issues of life. You need to create a sense of balance that comes from a steady effort to reinforce the fact that she knows that you are hers and you know that she is yours.

Leslie and I have a regular date day and one of the activities that we share has facilitated our love in a big way. We call it our “Spiritual Leadership Schedule.” It is our effort to be proactive rather than reactive in our marriage. During our quality time, we discuss each of the items on the following list.

SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP SCHEDULE

1. Discuss upcoming date
2. Share Bible memory verses
3. Discuss budget
4. Pray together
5. Evaluate personal quiet time
6. Plan weekly schedules together
7. Schedule/plan family devotions
8. Discuss wife’s outside activities
9. Conduct exercise program
10. Set projects (spiritual and home)
11. Discuss spiritual successes and failures
12. Set personal goals
13. Minister to each other over meals
14. Schedule next spiritual leadership time

Feel free to adapt this list to your personal needs. The point is to set aside quality time to spend with each other and use it to establish definite goals that will benefit you and your relationship. And remember to be proactive and not reactive!

A Perfect Relationship

“That they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us . . . The glory which You have

given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one; I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity.”

—JOHN 17:21–23

Speaking to the Father on our behalf, Jesus prays for those who believe in Him. It is clear from His words that Jesus wants us to be included in the picture of the Trinity. Here He describes the perfect relationship that is indicative of the Trinity. We should be thankful that, through God’s infinite love, He desires to unify us and make us perfect by our close association with Him. Since the concept of family existed in the Trinity first, when God designed man—both male and female—He did it so that the relationship would look like the Trinity. When you look back at the beginning of human existence, notice that it all started with a family—a man, a woman, and their children—which becomes a mirror of the Trinity.

This is a glorious thing. Not only are we in relationship with each other, but most importantly, God, our Creator, is at the center of that relationship. That’s the connection needed to make our marriages work; it’s the complete picture—a picture of perfection.

Then what does a godly relationship look like when it reflects the Trinity? The Members of the Godhead unequivocally honor and reverence one another. They don’t look to see who is number one on the marquee. The Father is always pointing to the Son and the Son is always pointing to the Father and the Spirit is always pointing to the Son. There is never a vote among the three on who will be promoted in the relationship. No one is complaining about the rotation. You won’t find the Trinity having arguments about one of the three always getting more attention than the other.

When you think about the Trinity, envision a picture of a relationship where there is no selfishness, only true harmony and perfection. The Father is not concerned about the Father; He is concerned about the Son. The Son is not concerned about the Son; He is devoted to the Father. The Spirit is not concerned about the Spirit; rather, His attention is focused on the Son.

Does this sound like the relationship between you and your mate? If so, let me be the first to commend you. If not, then you are like so many others. If you recognize that your marriage is in need of improvement and you

want a better relationship, then why not pray and get into agreement with God so that you and your spouse can get ready to make some real and positive change happen. It took some time before I reached the place in our marriage that I could accept what I could not change in my life. But, after much prayer, I recognized that a change needed to take place in me. The Holy Spirit then brought this Scripture to my attention: “*Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus,*” (Philippians 2:5a NKJV). Over and over I have prayed these words in my marriage, so that I would exercise the servanthood and humility of our Lord and that He would empower me to fulfill the vow that I made thirty-seven years ago—to have and to hold, in sickness and in health.

Someone has to take the first step in recognizing the need for change. Take a minute and reflect on your situation. Could it be that one or both of you may not think you’re ready? Often human nature is such that it just seems easier to do nothing and to deal with the status quo. If the climate in your marriage is less than desirable but you find it difficult to try and do anything about it, ask yourself, “So, what is it that’s holding me back?” Well, read on and allow me to show you some things. You might even recognize yourself and decide that you’re ready to do your part so that your marriage is more in alignment with God.

Selflessness versus Selfishness— How Do You Measure Up?

God wants us to grow continually in our marital relationships until we begin to imitate the Trinity. The nature of the Godhead, the pattern of the Trinity, is a selfless union. Therefore, I want to point out that this is a key ingredient that is lacking in many of our marriages—it is an attribute called *selflessness*. You need to understand that God would not have designed marriage to be like the Trinity if He had not made it possible for it to be so. But, as human beings, we have a problem that holds us back from assuming our rightful place in God. The issue is that all too often we operate in a mode of *selfishness* instead of selflessness.

Selfishness is the number one problem in marriage. It could be at the root of your problems too, and it’s very easy to test yourself and determine

where you stand. Three simple words can reveal whether you are operating in your marriage with a selfish attitude. They are: *I'm not happy*. It's not uncommon for us to be concerned about three persons: me, myself, and I. It says that your focus is not on pleasing God and having a desire to please your mate. Instead, your attitude shows that it's all about you.

Here's an "aha!" epiphany moment that is worthy of your consideration: God attuned marriage to the pattern of the Trinity so that you could understand that it's not about you. Rather, marriage is about you and your mate lining up with His Word. Sadly, it is an attitude of selfishness that causes us to break the model God has set with the Trinity. We spend a lot of time trying to figure out who is investing the most in the relationship. We waste time and energy trying to make sure the relationship is a fifty-fifty proposition. We are concerned about being taken advantage of and are overly cautious to avoid being "used." (Let me be clear, I am not talking about abusive situations here. This discussion is about plain old human nature and its tendency toward selfishness.) Too often getting our own needs met is more important than meeting our spouse's needs.

Instead of following the pattern of a perfect relationship set by God—a pattern of showing unconditional love, honor, and reverence for each other—many times we become record keepers in our marriages. We keep mental notes of what we do for him or her and whether or not our benevolence is being properly reciprocated. We are trying to make sure the other person isn't getting more out of the relationship than we are. That is not how the Trinity operates and it's not how God would have our marriages work either. The Word of God speaks succinctly to us through Philippians 2:3:

"Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves."

Now, think about this. Close your eyes for a moment and imagine what life would be like for you and your spouse if both of you treated each other the way that you personally want to be treated. Giving the highest amount of respect and adoration to each other would be a good thing, wouldn't it? There's nothing wrong with the two of you working together to make this a reality; in fact, it's about all that is righteous and good. And Jesus is with

you on this, backing you up with a simple command to show you where He stands:

“Treat others the same way you want them to treat you.”

—LUKE 6:31

The principle is very simple, yet we have such difficulty putting it into practice. How could you possibly go wrong with putting your mate first when at the same time he or she is putting your wants, needs, and desires before his or her own? When you get this, I guarantee that your life will be better; you’ll enjoy a far greater amount of success in your relationship. You’ll discover that life is much sweeter when you live it God’s way.

But somehow, we’ve got it all backwards. The pursuit to get married should not be an exercise in finding someone to do something for you: someone to take care of you, someone to keep you company, someone to protect you, someone to comfort you, or even someone to support you. That is not to say that these things should not happen in marriage—it’s just that they should not be the reason why we go into the marriage. Rather, we should be thinking the reverse and want to share our lives with someone whom we can love and support. There should be a strong desire to demonstrate godly care for one another, which is the result of each one placing the other first. That is how you get the most out of your marriage because that is how God designed it to be.

The truth is, if we would spend as much time worrying about our spouse’s needs as we do about our own, many problems in our marriages would be eliminated. Marriage is not about finding the right person; it is about *being* the right person. As a pastor, this is one of the reasons I am a strong proponent of premarital counseling. It is my opportunity to teach a couple why God created marriage and equip them with an understanding of the right reasons for getting married. They will then be better prepared to form a godly union that resembles the Trinity.

In fact, because God wants us to operate in a mode of selflessness, the Bible has a lot to say about what we are to do for each other. These declarations are commonly referred to as the “one anothers.” The “one anothers” are not just to govern our relationships with others in the body of Christ; they

should also be applied in marriage. To find out how you and your spouse measure up, check out the following chart. It lays out some food for serious thought on how, as believers in Christ, you are to treat each other (and everyone else that you encounter in life).

Mark 9:50	be at peace with one another
John 13:34–35	love one another
John 15:12, 17	love one another
Romans 12:10	be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor
Romans 12:16	be of same mind toward one another
Romans 13:8	owe nothing except love to one another
Romans 14:13	don't judge one another
Romans 14:19	build up one another
Romans 15:5	be of same mind with one another
Romans 15:7	accept one another
Romans 15:14	admonish one another
Romans 16:16	greet one another
1 Corinthians 7:5	stop depriving one another

The Word of God is the first source to tap into to help you avoid the pitfalls of selfish behavior. These verses tell you what God expects of us in our daily interactions. Let me suggest that you make a commitment to spend some quality time with this as a joint exercise. Studying these Scriptures together will give you and your mate a greater advantage. In other words, marriage is strengthened when a couple focuses on ministry to each other and is not focused on a selfish display of protecting “my rights.”

Well-known Christian author and Bible teacher Dr. Charles Swindoll makes a profound statement to married couples as he explains, “Being committed to one’s mate is not a matter of demanding rights, but releasing rights God has a better way: Surrender your rights. Lay down your arms. Release your grip on the things you’ve been fighting for. Commit the risk to God. Trust Him to defend you and keep you from being ripped off. I say that to husbands just as much as I do wives. Releasing rights, ideally, is a mutual thing—a duet, not a solo.”²

This is great advice for anyone who is interested in strengthening their relationship. Just think of the benefit your marriage would receive if you applied these words of wisdom in your situation.

The Art of Dying to Self

One rich man told his wife, “I think you only love me for my money. If I lost all my money, would you still love me?” She responded, “Of course, I would still love you! I would miss you, but I would still love you.”

Here’s the problem. Before there is one marriage, there needs to be two funerals. For the sake of your marriage, you must first die to yourself. If you don’t, you will end up with one wedding and two funerals. I’m talking about the need to die to your old self, that aspect of you which is wrapped up in selfish ways and tendencies so that your marriage can thrive.

If this sounds at all familiar and you know that your marriage is in trouble because of your selfish attitude, I strongly urge you to surrender to God—it’s the only way to get your marriage on the path to success God’s way. If you’re worried that you’ll be giving up your own rights, keep this in mind: When you both come into agreement to turn your marriage around, you won’t be losing anything by sacrificing your personal needs. In fact, just the opposite will be true. You have everything to gain.

Let’s face it, to fulfill God’s reasons for marriage you must have an unselfish mind-set. It’s absolutely the only way that you will be able to put away your own self-seeking desires and love your spouse with the love God expects from you. Far too often people get caught up in planning the wedding day and give little regard to the many days that will come after the ceremony is over and all of the wonderful festivities that go along with it. This is a trap that has led countless people from the altar to the courtroom in quick fashion. When asked why a couple ended up in divorce, someone once said that they never had a marriage, they only had a wedding. This is a sad but true commentary in so many cases.

It is a well-kept secret, but overlooking the example of the Trinity as it applies to marriage illustrates the number one reason why marriages are deteriorating at such an alarming rate. Following the pattern of the Trinity is the right prescription for marriage; it’s the missing ingredient. God Himself has

set the pattern for behavior by modeling what the relationship should look like. But instead of honoring each other as a married couple with the kind of reverence that the Members of the Trinity honor one another with, you have a problem with submitting to your mate. God is calling you to put away your old motives and die to your old self. When you don't give preference to your spouse's needs over your own, it won't work as God intended.

Let me give you some background to help you understand why it is absolutely necessary to answer God's call and align yourself with His desire for you to pattern your marriage after the Trinity. In Genesis chapter 1, God's focus is on the essence of the man and woman. They have co-dominion of the earth based on the equality that comes from the fact that both were made in the image of God.

Let me reiterate this important truth! Having dominion rights is based on the fact that man and woman possess the same essence because they were both made in the image of God. Clearly, then, God establishes the indisputable fact that man is not superior to the woman and the woman is not inferior to the man. It is an undeniable truth that they are equal because God patterned them both after the Trinity. Although they were not created at the same time, the account in Genesis chapter 1 is a summary of the creative process that combines the creation of two separate beings into one storyline. It is presented in this way so that no one would be confused when He delineates the functional order of the two beings in Genesis chapter 2.

Then, in the second chapter of Genesis, God gives the chronology of Adam and Eve's creation. It is understood that they were not created at the same time even though God made them equal in essence. They were designed to have different functions, and, like the Trinity, will align themselves in a functional order to accomplish God's purpose for them.

To further illustrate how the pattern of human creation and the pattern of the Trinity demonstrate equality as well as function, 1 Peter 1:1–2 delineates the function of each person of the Trinity as it relates to man's salvation:

“To those . . . who are chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood: May grace and peace be yours in the fullest measure.”

So then, the apostle Peter lays it out like this: God the Father appointed us to our salvation; God the Son atoned for us in salvation; and God the Holy Spirit applied our salvation to us. Even though the Members of the Godhead are equal in stature, they voluntarily aligned themselves in a function order for the purpose of providing salvation for us.

Paul takes this very practical analogy of the truth and applies it in 1 Corinthians 11:3 when he states, *“But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of a woman, and God is the head of Christ.”*

Here’s the parallel. When you became a believer, you entered into a marriage relationship with Christ, who is the Head of the church just as a husband is the head of his wife. This symbolic act is a bedrock tenet of our faith in God. Once you are a new creation in Christ, your old self has been put away and God has given you a new nature (2 Corinthians 5:17). But for the “new” you to come forth, you have to work with God. Listen to the words of the apostle Paul:

*“For if you are living according to the flesh, you must die;
but if by the Spirit you are putting to death
the deeds of the body, you will live.”*

—ROMANS 8:13

He is saying that you have to overcome your old ways and thoughts and give the Spirit of God room to help you live a new kind of life. The life that God wants you to have is one that is not selfish and self-centered but rather it is focused on serving Him and putting others first. Paul paints a picture of how this plays out in our relationship with Christ:

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

—ROMANS 12:1–2

We belong to Christ, we are members of His spiritual body—the church. When you make a commitment to God to live a new life in Christ, your decision requires you to give up your own fleshly desires to be more like your heavenly Creator God. However, you cannot do this without constantly feeding your mind and your spirit with the Word of God. It is the power that allows you to live according to the Spirit of God and to maintain vital fellowship with God.

Here's the solution. A marriage union can and should be a reflection of the Trinity. After all, this is God's first reason for marriage. Marriage is sacred to God, and He expects us to treat it that way. Paul was talking about this when he said we are to present God with a living sacrifice. It means dedicating your life and your marriage to Him. So, we should approach the state of matrimony by recognizing the pattern God designed for it. I know that you want to honor God with your marriage because it's a part of your responsibility to please Him in everything that you do. But you should know that you cannot accomplish this without giving to God what He asks of you—that which is a good and acceptable and perfect self-sacrifice.

As followers of Christ, it should be our desire to be like Him in every way possible. But we have to begin with exchanging our natural mind-set of selfishness with a spiritual mind-set of selflessness. This will only come by studying the Word of God and putting it into practice. When you and your spouse cooperate with God, He will bring abundant blessings to you that will make your marital union a spiritual reality—a reflection of God's Trinity.

God has blessed us with so many blessings that we can't even begin to count them all. All He asks of us in return is to obey Him. It should be a direct response to His love and the mercy and grace that He showers on us. But obedience requires you to connect with the Holy Spirit and allow Him to change your heart and your mind so that you view your life and your marriage with a heavenly minded perspective. He is just waiting for you to get in line with Him so that He can fulfill His work in and through you.

The Bible calls us as believers to follow Jesus' example and emulate His selfless behavior. So, perfecting the art of dying to self needs to be a constant goal. Our good friend Paul, the apostle, spoke of the seriousness of putting this idea into practice. He brilliantly captured what we have to do in our walk with Christ when he said,

*“I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live,
but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh
I live by faith in the Son of God,
who loved me and gave Himself up for me.”*

—GALATIANS 2:20

In the same way that Paul recognized the change that took place in him when he became a believer, you have to realize the contrast between how you once lived and how you must allow the power of God’s Word to put that old life to death in you. If you want your marriage to be pleasing in God’s eyes, I can’t stress enough that the old life in the flesh and its negative behavior that resisted the idea of submission has to die.

Giving up your personal desires for the sake of your marriage means that you have to renew your mind and build up your faith. As Paul acknowledged, you must get to the point that you are able to “die daily” (1 Corinthians 15:31). There are no shortcuts. You have to cooperate with the Spirit of God. As you yield to Him and allow God’s Spirit to live large within you, your flesh won’t win. It can’t win over the power of God. You will get the victory and that’s a promise from God. I know for certain that I could not have made it through some difficult times without relying on God’s power and grace. I love my wife and throughout our marriage Jesus has taught me how to overcome our difficulties by serving her with the mind of Christ and not my own. I cannot take any credit; I can only look at us through the mirror of our struggles and see how the selflessness of the Trinity is at work.

So, find out where you are concerning your marriage. Do so by using the Word as a mirror and asking God to show you your true self. A good place to begin transforming your mind is to meditate on Philippians 2:2–5. These verses beautifully describe the real deal that must be at the foundation of every marriage:

“Make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out

*for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.
Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus.”*

Whether you are already married or planning to get married, the road to victory is the same. It starts with your commitment to a godly relationship. Having a relationship with God at the center will make your marriage connect with the pattern of the Trinity. All I ask is that you be honest with yourself. If you are willing to take a long, hard, prayerful look at yourself, you may find that you must put aside some old ways that aren't working to benefit you and your mate. I strongly encourage you to examine your current motives and behavior since they may be serving to hinder the success of your relationship and keeping you from pleasing God. It's never too late to change; you just have to begin the process of hooking up your marriage with God.

So, prepare yourself: your awakening will come through constant and fervent prayer and placing your trust and confidence in God with a sincere heart.

A Spiritual Reality—Getting Connected

Often as we read the Bible we envision the people in biblical history as pristine characters. In other words, we don't see the people in the Bible as *real people* who had flesh and blood and emotions like us. Pick a soap opera, any soap opera. It won't be any more entertaining than many of the stories you find in the Word of God. That is, if you read it with the right eyes.

The Story of Joseph and Mary

When I read the Bible, sometimes I find myself saying, “Lord, I don't need television!” There are some stories in the Bible that would make hit television shows. Like Joseph and Mary's story, for example. When Mary discovered that she was pregnant, they were legally married. They had commenced their marriage but had not consummated it, meaning they hadn't had sex yet. In fact, custom dictated that they had to wait for one year. So, put on your sanctified imagination and picture this scenario.

Joseph goes over to Mary's house and this is what happened. "Hey, Mary! Girl, you've gained weight! What have you been eating! You haven't been eating pork, have you?" Mary responds, "Joseph, I have something to tell you. It may sound a little strange, even unbelievable, but I need you to trust me and to remain calm. Joseph, I am pregnant." Joseph reacts with shock, "What! What did you say? Wait a minute! Did you just tell me that you are pregnant? I know for a fact that we haven't consummated our marriage."

Mary pleads, "Please calm down and let me explain." Joseph says with indignation, "What is there to explain? You're pregnant and it's not mine. Exactly what is it that you want to explain?" Mary continues, "I am trying to tell you how it happened." Joseph retorts, "Oh, I think we both know how it happened. I'm more interested in why." Mary responds, "Please, Joseph. You really don't understand." Joseph questions, "What don't I understand, Mary? You are my wife. We have not had sex. You are pregnant. It is not mine! What am I confused about? What is it that you need to explain?"

"Joseph, please listen to me. I'm pregnant by the Holy Spirit," Mary explains. "You're what! Whose is it? The Holy Spirit! From the looks of things, I think you've had time to come up with something better than this. I know that's not the best you can do for an explanation. I'll give you a few minutes to try again." Joseph is furious.

"I am telling you the truth. I am pregnant by the Holy Spirit," Mary says. "Since when does the Holy Spirit go around impregnating other men's wives? If I were to believe that, then tell me how holy can He be if He gets my wife pregnant!" Joseph shoots back. "No, Joseph, you don't understand," Mary goes on. "An angel appeared to me and said I would become pregnant by the Holy Spirit."

"Mary, I need to get away from you for a little bit. I don't understand why you wish to insult my intelligence in this way, but I think it is best that I remove myself from your presence right now."

Now, what could be a bigger problem than that? This is a huge problem! He could have had her stoned to death, but Joseph was a good man and made up his mind that he would just put Mary away privately. If he had done so, Mary would have had no choice but to accept his decision. She would then need to find her own way in life as an unwed mother. That could

not have been an easy road to take for either of them—particularly since they would have been outside of God’s will. But, thanks be to God, we know that is not how their story ended.

Allow me to serve you notice: the problem with your marriage—however you might see it—is not the problem. It’s the way that you and your spouse handle your problem that is the problem. Joseph and Mary were confronted with a major predicament that could have split them up and changed their lives drastically. According to the law of the land, he should have had her stoned or at least divorced her. That was the law, it was his legal right.

Why didn’t that happen? The first thing they did was receive God’s Word about their situation. Luke reported that the angel visited Mary with the news of her pregnancy (Luke 1:26–38). Mary accepted it and submitted her will to God. The book of Matthew records that the angel came to Joseph and told him not to worry about it because Mary was telling the truth (Matthew 1:18–25). When the angel confirmed the truth to Joseph that she was pregnant by the Holy Spirit, he acknowledged that word and acted in obedience to God’s will.

There is a powerful thing about how Joseph and Mary handled their dilemma; not only did they *hear* the same message, they heeded the same message. They trusted God. We can learn a critical lesson from their story because this is where we often miss it. Joseph and Mary were on the same spiritual wavelength. That is what enabled them to hear the same message and respond positively to God’s direction. They may have had to face some difficulty because they chose to obey God, but they made the right choice anyway. As a result, they found themselves in alignment with God’s will. Lining up in obedience to God and what He tells you to do may not always seem like the easiest route to take, but it will make all the difference in the world for you—just as it did for Joseph and Mary.

Don’t miss this point. They could not have succeeded in making the right choice if they were not connecting on the same wavelength, getting the same message, and responding to it in the same way—in obedience to God. Moreover, Joseph and Mary didn’t hear the same thing and come up with separate responses. If they had taken another approach and ignored God’s message, solving their dilemma would not have been possible. They

would have been forced to face the consequences of their actions. Instead, they both surrendered in obedience to God and followed His path for their lives.

That's what is wrong with many marriages today. Husbands and wives are not on the same spiritual wavelength. They are not connecting with God. And when conflict arises, one partner is on an AM frequency, the other partner is on an FM wavelength, and God is beaming through on satellite. They haven't tuned in to God and what God is saying. They are not connecting to the Source from which all blessings flow so they can hear clearly what God is saying to them. You have to first connect with Him and then trust Him enough to line up with His will.

When conflict arises and you and your spouse are having trouble handling it properly, you are probably on two different wavelengths. After making a decision to try to fix a problem, do you ever regret the outcome? Think back on some of your difficulties—does this sound familiar? If so, you probably weren't connected with God's purpose in the way that Joseph and Mary succeeded in doing. When you are in tune with God, you will know when your struggle has been resolved with God's help.

God will intervene in your situation and send word about how to solve your marital conflict. But it's how you receive the message and then respond to it that matters. It all comes down to hearing and obeying God's Word; but first you have to be on the same frequency with Him to even hear the same thing. That is what determines whether you and your spouse will experience victory in God.

Joseph and Mary allowed themselves to be on the same spiritual wavelength and that made them a spiritual couple. As a result, God was able to minister to them. Theirs was a true picture of the pattern of how the Trinity works together for our good. Joseph was willing to do what he knew was best for Mary at the expense of his own reputation. He gave up his right to vindicate himself and have her punished. And Mary humbly allowed God to have His way in her life. Both of them were rewarded for their faithfulness. This kind of love comes directly from obeying God and creates a strong foundation for marriage. It is the giving up of one's rights for the benefit of the other. And that is something that we need to see more of in our marriages today.

When you and your spouse make the connection with God's Trinity, the Word of the Lord will become true in your marriage, "*With God nothing will be impossible*" (Luke 1:37 NKJV).

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 pattern of the Trinity). He will hear your sincere prayers and help you to transform your marriage into a reflection of His image.
2. Keep in mind that strong communication between you and your spouse is of utmost importance to the success of your marriage. If you haven't already done so, start a regular prayer and spiritual leadership time with your spouse where you talk about your concerns and your victories.
3. Both of you should then set aside some regular personal devotion time to spend with the Lord. When you go before the Lord, ask Him to help you understand His seven reasons and how they relate to your marriage. Ask the Lord to show you how you can begin to implement them in your relationship. Ask the Lord to give you the grace daily to help you focus on the adjustments you need to make.
4. Begin a personal journal by writing a brief statement that expresses your and your spouse's reasons for getting married. Talk about your dreams and aspirations. What do you plan to accomplish through your marriage? Share with each other how you will work toward achieving your personal plans and how they work together with the overall reason for why you got married. Record your individual thoughts and feelings on these subjects.

5. Break down the results of your discussion so that you can set some practical goals. Write out your goals and how you plan to reach them. Review them regularly during your spiritual leadership time. Begin by answering the following questions and add others that are appropriate for you and your spouse: What are your spiritual goals? What are your financial goals? What are your health and fitness goals? And so on.
6. Describe in as much detail as you can how you will reach your goals. Define what the results will look like in your life and marriage.
7. List the areas in your life that you need to yield to the Lord so that He can help you be a better spouse.
8. Search the Scriptures and write out some key verses that will reinforce your ability to implement the new actions you will take in your life and marriage. Commit the verses to memory.