How to Strengthen Your Marriage

Lessons from Fourteen Marriages in Scripture

by Oludare Akinbo

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— Genesis 2:24 NKJV

"And above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection."
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Dedication

To my wife, Ruth Chidinma Morenike Akinbo — for a partnership that has taught me, in the most ordinary of days and not only the extraordinary ones, what patient, steady love actually costs and actually gives. Every principle in this book was tested first in our own home before it was ever written down.

And to the memory of my late wife, Oluwatohungbogbo Tolulope Akinbo (1977–2024) — a marriage cut shorter than either of us would have chosen, but not shorter than its lessons have lasted. Some of what this book knows about covenant, mutual respect, unwavering commitment, resilience, shared faith, and intentional trust in God regardless of circumstance, I first learned inside that marriage, along with patience, and a love whose strength never depended on being deserved.

What we shared was never weakened, not even slightly, by either of our individual flaws. If anything, it only grew stronger through our mutual commitment to serve and live for the best of one another, walking together with the God who had brought us together, and who blessed us with every one of the years we were given.

To both, and to every couple willing to do the harder, slower work of building a marriage that actually holds — this book is yours.

Acknowledgement

Above all, I acknowledge the God who called me at this time, redeemed me, and opened my eyes to the eternal principles in His word — principles that provide the ultimate guidelines for how to navigate and live this life successfully. I am still far from attaining the perfection that is the goal and purpose of that calling, and I say so plainly rather than as false modesty. Yet I remain humbly and deeply grateful for His grace, mercy, and blessings, as He continues to refine and purify me through this life, so that even now, unfinished as I am, I might offer Him a sacrifice of praise (Hebrews 13:15).

I am deeply grateful for the blessing of my late wife, Oluwatohungbogbo Tolulope Akinbo (1977–2024), through and with whom He exposed me to the practical lessons and genuine joy of marriage, and to having a soulmate who made our years together truly wonderful, impactful, and edifying. He continues that same refining, enlightening work in my current marriage, to Ruth Chidinma Morenike Akinbo, as I devote myself to tapping all that His word contains and to the empowerment of His Holy Spirit — for the strengthening of my own marriage, and for every reader of this book whose marriage I pray will come to truly reflect the mystery Scripture describes between Christ and the church, and the depth of our Creator's love for us.

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About This Book

Divorce is rising nearly as fast as marriage itself. Fewer people even want to marry anymore, and the reasons run deeper than economics. *How to Strengthen Your Marriage* offers a different kind of diagnosis — not borrowed from a headline or a movement, but drawn directly from seventeen chapters of Scripture's own record of marriage, both broken and held.

Eight marriages are examined for exactly how they came apart — Adam and Eve's blame, Samson and Delilah's deception, David and Michal's contempt, Ahab and Jezebel's silence, Solomon's divided devotion, Hosea and Gomer's unfaithfulness and costly redemption, Ananias and Sapphira's shared deception. Six more are examined for how they held — Manoah and his wife, Isaac and Rebekah, Boaz and Ruth, Elkanah and Hannah, Priscilla and Aquila, and Jehoiada and Jehoshabeath's shared courage.

Two further chapters turn from narrative to direct command — what Scripture asks of a husband and a wife, each addressed independently and unconditionally, and the specific pitfalls capable of sabotaging either calling. A closing chapter gathers every thread into a practical, prayerful path forward.

This is not a book of easy answers, and it does not pretend every marriage's pain resolves the same way. It is a patient, Scripture-grounded case that marriage was always meant to hold — and that it still can.

To the Reader

If you picked up a book about strengthening a marriage — whether your own is struggling, steady, or still ahead of you — I don't believe that was chance either. Thank you for the courage and the honesty it took to open it.

The chapters ahead move through fourteen real marriages, mostly short — only the last one runs long, gathering the threads of everything before it into something practical. Read at whatever pace actually suits you, and where a chapter names something too close to home, let it.

Your honest feedback, in whatever form it takes, is genuinely welcome — at **oludare@tishrinig.com**, or through the contact form and details available on my website **https://oludareakinbo.com/contact-us**.

Thank you, and may you be edified.

A Word Before We Begin

Divorce is rising nearly as fast as marriage itself these days. Fewer people even want to marry anymore — and while the cost of a wedding in many places is real, it is not the whole story. The deeper reason is simpler and harder to admit: too many of the marriages people actually see up close, in their own families and communities, are troubled. What used to be a lifelong covenant increasingly looks, to a watching generation, like a risk not worth taking.

Something has genuinely shifted in how men and women relate to one another, and it did not shift by accident. This book will not spend its pages assigning that shift to a single cause or a single movement — the truth is rarely that simple, and Scripture itself is far more interested in the actual patterns inside a marriage than in which modern trend gets the blame for them. What follows instead is fourteen marriages, drawn directly from Scripture, each one showing with uncomfortable clarity how a specific dynamic — deception, disrespect, compromise, jealousy, unfaithfulness — actually unravels a home from the inside. And where Scripture also shows us marriages that held, that grew, that were built on something sturdier than either party's mood that day, this book will show those too.

The diagnosis this book offers is not a modern one, borrowed from a headline or a movement. It is the same diagnosis Scripture has been offering since Genesis 3, when the first marriage's first real conflict began with blame passed in both directions rather than sin owned by either. Every marriage since has had some version of that same choice available to it. This book exists to make both the danger and the choice unmistakably clear.

Quick Start

If You Want the Practical Help First

This book builds its case slowly and deliberately, through fourteen real marriages before it ever states Scripture's commands directly. That is intentional — principle argued only in the abstract rarely holds up under real pressure the way principle demonstrated in a real story does. But if today is a day your marriage needs something practical rather than a story, here are ten of this book's concrete tools gathered up front, each one pointing forward to the fuller chapter where it actually gets built.

1. Own your part before explaining it. Apologize fully, then stop — no reasons, no excuses. See Chapter 1.

2. Don't let a shortcut bypass God. Bring big decisions back to Him together before acting on them. See Chapter 2.

3. Choose character over charm before choosing anyone to build a life with. See Chapter 3.

4. Raise small grievances early, privately, before they harden into contempt. See Chapter 4.

5. A husband leads actively — he does not silently benefit from decisions he never questioned. See Chapter 5.

6. Agree on your non-negotiables before you are tested, not during the test itself. See Chapter 6.

7. Build transparency into ordinary life before trust is ever actually tested. See Chapter 7.

8. Give each other standing permission to call a private "truth check" at any time. See Chapter 8.

9. Neither spouse owns their own body alone — withholding intimacy as leverage has no scriptural cover. See Chapter 16.

10. Complaint speaks about an action; contempt speaks about a person. Learn the difference, and practice only the first. See Chapter 17.

If any one of these already speaks directly to where your marriage is today, go to that chapter now. The rest of this book will still be here.

Introduction

Learning, Not Judging

It may seem, at first glance, an uncomfortable project to revisit fourteen marriages this way — naming exactly where eight of them broke, and holding real people up as either warning or example thousands of years after they lived. It is worth saying plainly, before Chapter 1 begins, why this book exists and what it is not trying to do.

This is not an exercise in judging the dead. Paul gives the actual reason Scripture preserves accounts like these at all, and it has nothing to do with condemnation:

> *"Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come."*
> *— 1 CORINTHIANS 10:11*

"Written for our admonition" is Paul's own explanation for why the failures of real people — not hypothetical characters, but Adam, David, Solomon, named and unhidden — were preserved in such honest detail. Scripture is not, as a rule, protective of its own heroes' reputations. David's adultery and its cover-up are not softened or omitted. Solomon's compromise is not quietly edited out of the record. This candor was never an accident, and Paul names its purpose directly: so that a much later generation, reading these accounts long after the people in them were gone, could learn from them what those people themselves sometimes had to learn the hard way.

Paul makes the same point elsewhere in almost identical language: "For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope" (Romans 15:4). Notice what this verse names as the actual outcome of reading rightly — not shame, not superiority over people who failed differently than we do, but patience, comfort, and hope. A reader who finishes this book feeling superior to Ahab or contemptuous of Michal has misread it. A reader who finishes it

recognizing their own instinct to blame, their own season of impatience, their own silence where courage was called for, has read it exactly as it was intended.

None of the fourteen marriages ahead are examined to settle a verdict on people who cannot answer for themselves. They are examined so that the marriages still being lived out today — including, quite personally, my own, and quite possibly yours — might learn what they modeled or warned against, while there is still time to choose differently. That is the entire purpose of everything that follows.

Part One

Marriages That Broke

Eight marriages, examined in the order Scripture presents them, for exactly what went wrong between the two people inside them — not to condemn them, but so the same patterns can be recognized and refused before they do the same damage again.

Chapter 1

Adam and Eve: Blame Instead of Ownership

Every marriage that has ever struggled has, somewhere underneath its specific complaint, a much older story running quietly in the background. It is worth starting there — not because Adam and Eve's marriage looked anything like a modern one, but because the very first recorded conflict between a husband and wife set a pattern every marriage since has had to reckon with, one way or another.

A Marriage Before the Fall

Genesis introduces marriage before it introduces sin, and the order matters. God's own commentary on the very first marriage is unambiguous:

> *"Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed." — GENESIS 2:24-25*

"One flesh" is not a euphemism in this passage. It is God's own description of what marriage actually is — not two separate lives running in parallel, but a union so complete that Scripture reaches for the language of a single body to describe it. And the unashamed nakedness that follows describes something modern marriages spend years trying to recover: complete exposure, physical and otherwise, without fear of what the other person will do with what they see.

This is worth naming plainly, because it describes the real test many marriages are actually failing today, long before infidelity or open conflict ever enters the picture. The fear most corrosive to a modern marriage is rarely the fear of being caught doing something wrong. It is the quieter, more constant fear of being completely known — every insecurity, every past failure, every unflattering thought voiced in a weak moment — and discovering that the knowledge did not stay safe. A spouse who has ever had something vulnerable

used against them later, brought back up in an argument months afterward, judged rather than simply received, or quietly held as evidence against who they might become, learns quickly to stop offering it. Unashamed nakedness, in Eden's sense, required a settled confidence that whatever was seen would never later be turned into a weapon, a verdict, or a preemptive judgment. Where that confidence is missing, spouses rarely announce it. They simply, quietly, begin covering again.

The First Crack

That initial condition of the very first marriage — complete union, complete exposure, and not one trace of fear about what the other would do with what they saw — did not survive the next chapter. Genesis 3 records the fall in careful detail, and it is easy, reading it quickly, to miss how much of the chapter is actually about the marriage rather than only about the fruit. When God confronts Adam, the answer he gives is worth reading slowly:

> *"Then the man said, 'The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I ate.'" — GENESIS 3:12*

Notice the structure of that sentence before its content. Adam does not simply say "I ate." He builds a sentence with two accusations folded into it before he ever reaches his own action — first aimed at God ("the woman whom You gave"), then aimed at Eve ("she gave me"). His own verb, "I ate," arrives last, almost as an afterthought, buried under two layers of blame. This is the first recorded instance of a husband under pressure reaching for blame before he reaches for honesty, and it would not be the last time Scripture records the pattern.

Eve's own answer, a verse earlier, follows the identical shape: "The serpent deceived me, and I ate" (Genesis 3:13). Neither spouse lies about what happened. Both are, in a narrow sense, telling the truth. But both reach instinctively for a story in which someone else is the reason, and the marriage — which had been unashamed and completely exposed one chapter earlier — is now a place where blame moves in both directions before anyone actually

owns what they did.

This pattern is far more common today than most couples realize, and I include myself in that number. In years of counseling couples, and more recently in my own marriage, I have watched genuinely well-meaning spouses reach for the same three steps, in some order, whenever they are actually trying to make peace after a crisis: first, giving reasons for what they did, which almost always land on the other person's ear as excuses rather than explanation; then an apology; then, often, an explanation of how the other person should have reacted differently so the tension would never have escalated the way it did. This approach rarely works. It asks the offended spouse to receive an apology wrapped in justification, and most hearts, however willing, cannot actually do that.

PRACTICAL TIP

Ownership First, Apology Second, Nothing Else Added

A different order, simpler and considerably harder to practice, tends to work far better, and it takes real humility to hold to it.

First: take ownership of your own part in the conflict, in a soft, sincere tone — in body language as much as in words — regardless of whether you believe you were the one who started it, and even if you were the one who was actually wronged, as long as you are the one choosing to take this step toward peace.

Second: apologize, and at this point, where it is welcome, reach for an actual hand, sit closer, offer an embrace as the words are spoken. Then stop. No reasons. No explanation of what led to it. No instruction on how the other person ought to have responded instead. Words explaining why almost always sound, to the person receiving them, like an excuse arriving disguised as an apology — and they tend to reopen exactly the tension the apology was meant to close.

Ownership first, apology second, nothing else added, is a harder discipline than it sounds, because it asks a person to set aside the desire to be understood, or even to be right, for the sake of simply being together again.

Peter names this same principle from another direction entirely — not confession this time, but conduct itself doing work that words could not. Writing to wives married to husbands who would not adhere to the word, difficult men giving them little reason to expect change, he points them toward behavior rather than argument:

> *"Wives, likewise, be submissive to your own husbands, that even if some do not obey the word, they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives, when they observe your chaste conduct accompanied by fear."*
> *— 1 PETER 3:1-2*

"Without a word" is the phrase worth sitting with. Peter is not asking these wives to argue their husbands into godliness, or to explain, however patiently, why their husbands' conduct falls short. He is naming a power in consistent behavior that persuasion by words had apparently already failed to produce. The same principle that makes a short apology land better than a long explanation is at work here on a larger scale: a life observed over time tends to change a heart in ways an argument, however correct, rarely manages on its own.

When words are actually called for, though, Scripture is just as specific about what they should and should not contain.

Contrition Without Excuses

2 Samuel 12:13; Luke 15:17-21; 18:13

Scripture offers its own clearest examples of exactly this pattern, worth setting directly against Adam's answer in the garden. When the prophet Nathan finally confronts David over Bathsheba and Uriah, David's entire recorded response is five words: "I have sinned against the LORD" (2 Samuel 12:13). No mention of the pressures of the throne, no mention of what Bathsheba was doing visible from his rooftop, no mention of anything Uriah did or did not do. Just the admission, offered as quickly as the accusation landed.

The same pattern shapes the prodigal son's rehearsed return. Luke's narrative had already recorded exactly what happened to his inheritance — "wasted his possessions with prodigal living", then a famine arriving on top of it (Luke 15:13-14). None of that makes it into the confession he actually prepares: "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, and am no longer worthy to be called your son" (15:18-19). He had a true, sympathetic explanation available to him, and chose not to lead with it.

Jesus names this same posture directly in His own parable of two men praying. The tax collector, "standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me a sinner!'" (Luke 18:13) — seven words, no elaboration, no defense. Jesus' own verdict is direct: "this man went down to his house justified rather than the other" (18:14), not the Pharisee who had recited his own credentials at length. Scripture's commendation, across every one of these accounts, falls consistently on confession stripped bare of explanation — never on the more detailed, more understandable version.

The Hiding That Started It

Genesis 3:7-10

Before the blame, there was hiding. "Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves coverings" (Genesis 3:7). This is worth connecting directly to the marriage: the very first thing sin produced between a husband and wife was concealment — covering themselves from each other before God ever arrived to ask a single question.

When God does call out to Adam, his answer names the real wound precisely: "I heard Your voice in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; and I hid myself" (3:10). Fear had entered a relationship that had known none of it. And fear, in any marriage, tends to produce exactly what it produced in Eden: concealment first, blame second, and distance as the accumulating result of both.

Every marriage (and other relationships too) carries some version of this same sequence available to it under pressure — something goes wrong, and the instinctive move is to cover rather than confess, then to explain rather than to own. Genesis 3 does not merely describe an ancient event. It describes a pattern every marriage since needs to consciously resist choosing to stay strong.

Ownership as the Alternative

This chapter is not arguing that spouses should never explain context, or that every hard conversation collapses into blame. It is arguing something narrower and more practical: that the instinct Adam modeled — building a sentence that reaches for someone else's fault before reaching for one's own — is available to every husband and wife under pressure, and that a marriage's health depends heavily on which instinct gets trained instead. James offers the alternative discipline directly: "Confess your trespasses to one another" (James 5:16) — not your spouse's trespasses, recited on their behalf, but one's own, named first and named plainly.

A marriage where both people have practiced saying "I was wrong" before saying "but you" is a marriage that has already recovered something Eden lost in a single afternoon.

Reflection

1. When something goes wrong in my marriage, is my first instinct to explain my own part, or to explain my spouse's part?

2. Is there something I have been hiding or covering from my spouse, the way Adam and Eve first hid from God?

3. What would it look like this week to confess a fault plainly, the way James 5:16 asks, before any explanation of circumstances?

Chapter 2

Abraham, Sarah, and Hagar: Impatience and Jealousy

Some marriages are damaged by a single dramatic betrayal. Far more are damaged the way Abraham and Sarah's was — by one reasonable-sounding decision, made under the pressure of a promise that was taking longer to arrive than anyone expected, whose consequences neither of them could have fully seen coming at the time.

A Promise Not Yet Kept

God had already promised Abraham a son and descendants beyond counting (Genesis 15:4-5). Ten years passed with no child. It is into that specific waiting — not doubt about whether God had spoken, but exhaustion with how long His timing was taking — that Sarah makes her proposal:

> *"So Sarai said to Abram, 'See now, the LORD has restrained me from bearing children. Please, go in to my maid; perhaps I shall obtain children by her.'" — GENESIS 16:2*

Sarah's plan was a recognized custom of her time — a childless wife providing her servant to bear children on her behalf was not unusual in the ancient Near East. It was also, on its own terms, an attempt to accomplish through human arrangement exactly what God had already promised to accomplish Himself. The plan was not evidence that Sarah had abandoned faith in God's promise. It was evidence of impatience with His timing — a substitution of her own method for His, while still technically believing the outcome He had spoken.

A Husband's Compliance

What follows is worth reading carefully, because it names Abraham's own part in the decision with a single, precise phrase:

> *"And Abram heeded the voice of Sarai…Then Sarai, Abram's wife, took Hagar her maid…and gave her to her husband Abram to be his wife." — GENESIS 16:2-3*

"Abram heeded the voice of Sarai" is not, by itself, a condemnation of a husband listening to his wife — Scripture elsewhere commends exactly that kind of partnership, and this book will spend later chapters showing marriages where a husband's willingness to listen was a genuine strength. What makes this instance different is what Abraham was listening to instead of: he had heard God's own voice promise him a son directly, more than once, and chose in this moment to act on his wife's proposed shortcut rather than return to God with the tension between the promise and the wait. A husband can love his wife and still owe her the honesty of saying, "let us bring this back to God before we act on it." Abraham, on this occasion, did not.

A stronger, more godly answer was available to him in that moment — not harsh, but firm: "I understand what you are saying, but I must say no. This goes contrary to what I believe God wants us to do." Scripture holds household leadership to exactly this standard when it names the qualification for a man entrusted with leadership in the church: "one who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence…for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?" (1 Timothy 3:4-5 NKJV). A husband who cannot bring himself to say no to his own wife, gently but firmly, when what she is asking runs contrary to what he already knows God has said, has not yet grown into the leadership Scripture actually asks of him.

The Greek word behind "rules" here rewards a closer look. *Proistēmi* is a compound of *pro* ("before," "in front of") and *histēmi* ("to stand") — literally, to stand before, to stand at the front. It describes a man positioned to lead from in front of his household, absorbing the weight of a hard decision first, not a man standing beside in vague, undifferentiated authority, and certainly not one standing behind, waiting to be told what has already been decided without him. The same word describes elders who "rule well" in 1 Timothy 5:17, and it carries none of the apologetic, conflict-avoidant hesitation increasingly

modeled today as though it were humility. A man called to stand before his household is a man expected to give direction, take responsibility first, and say no when no is what the moment actually requires — precisely what Abraham failed to do here, and precisely what a husband modeled on Christ, examined more fully in Chapter 15 (*What Each Spouse Owes God, Not Each Other*), is still called to do.

Hagar: Seen in the Wilderness

Genesis 16:4-13

Hagar bore the heaviest cost of a decision she had no part in making. Once she conceived, "her mistress became despised in her eyes" (Genesis 16:4) — contempt flowing from the servant now elevated above the wife who had arranged it. Sarah's response was equally severe: she "dealt harshly with her, and she fled from her presence" (16:6). Two women, both genuinely wronged by the situation they had been placed inside, ended up wounding each other rather than the arrangement that had actually caused the damage.

What happens next is easy to miss in a story mostly remembered for its conflict: God finds Hagar alone by a spring in the wilderness, pregnant, fleeing, with nowhere left to go — and speaks to her directly, by name (16:7-8). Her own response to that encounter becomes one of Scripture's most striking names for God: "You-Are-the-God-Who-Sees...Have I also here seen Him who sees me?" (16:13). The woman with the least power in the entire arrangement was the one God met personally, in the wilderness her own household's impatience had driven her into.

This detail matters for any marriage tempted toward a shortcut of its own: the people affected by one couple's impatience are not abstractions. They are real, and God sees them as clearly in the wilderness their situation created as He sees the couple whose decision put them there.

The Jealousy That Followed

The consequences of Genesis 16 did not stay contained to Genesis 16. Years later, after Isaac — the actual promised son — is finally born, an old tension resurfaces at his weaning celebration:

> *"...Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, scoffing. Therefore she said to Abraham, 'Cast out this bondwoman and her son, for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, namely with Isaac.'" — GENESIS 21:9-10*

Sarah's jealousy here is not really a new problem. It is the old, unresolved arrangement from Genesis 16 finally surfacing in full, years after the original decision had seemingly been absorbed into ordinary household life. This is worth sitting with honestly: jealousy this severe rarely appears out of nowhere. It is usually the overdue interest on a wound that was never actually healed, only tolerated, and the arrangement Sarah herself had proposed in a moment of impatience became the very thing her heart could not finally make peace with.

Trusting God's Timing

The chapter that finally records Isaac's birth opens with a quiet, deliberate contrast to everything that came before it:

> *"And the LORD visited Sarah as He had said, and the LORD did for Sarah as He had spoken. For Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age, at the set time of which God had spoken to him." — GENESIS 21:1-2*

The promise arrived exactly as God had said, at exactly the time God had set — which had never actually needed Sarah's help to arrive.

Every marriage faces its own version of a promise that seems to be taking too long — reconciliation that has not come, a prayer that has not been answered, a season that will not end. Genesis 16 and 21, read together, do not argue that waiting on God is easy. They argue something narrower and more useful: that the shortcuts couples reach for under pressure tend to cost more, and cost people who never agreed to pay it, than the waiting ever would have.

PRACTICAL TIP

A Shared Faith Makes Waiting Lighter, Not Easy

Trusting God's timing genuinely requires both husband and wife to share a strong faith — a real belief that He is "a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him" (Hebrews 11:6) and that it is simply not in His nature to lie (Titus 1:2; Numbers 23:19). This tends to be considerably easier in practice when both spouses worship the same God and hold the same belief system. Paul's own instruction not to be "unequally yoked with unbelievers" (2 Corinthians 6:14) has real, practical weight here, beyond its usual application to marriage itself: a shared faith does not make a marriage impatience-proof, but it does make it considerably easier to let patience "have its perfect work" (James 1:4) when a promise is taking longer than either spouse hoped.

This has practical value mainly in one specific moment: when one spouse is growing impatient, the other, sharing the same faith, can gently remind them of what God has actually promised, rather than either dismissing the impatience or amplifying it. My wife and I have lived this more than once in our own marriage — praying together over a specific need, agreeing on a timeframe we felt was reasonable to bring before God, and trusting His wisdom regardless of the outcome. As a wait stretched past what we had hoped, real impatience has set in on both of us at different moments — not unbelief, but a mounting weight that tested our peace with each other as much as our patience with God.

What steadied us, each time, was the same thing: whichever of us happened to be believing more strongly in that particular season gently reminded the other of what we had actually prayed and agreed on together, rather than either of us pretending the wait was easy or quietly assuming God had forgotten. Provision has come, more than once, close enough to what we originally placed before Him that it reinforced, for both of us, that God is good, that He hears, and that His plans for a couple are good even when the waiting makes that hard to feel in the moment. Not every couple's waiting resolves so visibly or so quickly — some have waited years, some over a decade, still trusting — and this book holds those couples in the same prayer and the same comfort Scripture offers, without pretending every story resolves on the same schedule.

Reflection

1. Is there a promise or a prayer in my own marriage I have grown impatient with — tempted to solve my own way rather than keep waiting on God's timing for it?

2. Like Abraham, is there a decision I made by heeding my spouse's voice when I should have first brought the matter back to God?

3. Is there an old, unresolved arrangement or decision in my own marriage that keeps resurfacing, the way Sarah's jealousy resurfaced years later — something that was tolerated but never actually healed?

Chapter 3

Samson and Delilah: Deception and Betrayal

Some relationships are damaged by a single lie discovered too late. Samson's was damaged by a lie discovered three times, confirmed as a pattern, and returned to anyway a fourth time — which makes his story less a tale of one betrayal than a case study in what happens when attraction is allowed to override every available warning sign.

Strength Without Roots

Samson's calling was set apart from birth — a Nazirite, consecrated to God, carrying supernatural strength tied directly to that consecration (Judges 13:5). His pattern of choosing relationships, though, ran on a different logic entirely. Of the Timnite woman he first pursued, his own words to his parents were the whole of his reasoning: "Get her for me, for she pleases me well" (Judges 14:3). Delilah, later, is introduced with no more depth than that he "loved a woman...whose name was Delilah" (16:4) — attraction stated, character unexamined.

The Pattern of Being Persuaded

What follows is one of Scripture's most patient records of a manipulation actually working:

> *"Then she said to him, 'How can you say, "I love you," when your heart is not with me?...tell me where your great strength lies.'...So he told her all his heart." — JUDGES 16:15-17*

This exchange was not Delilah's first attempt. Three times before this, she asked the same question, Samson gave a false answer, and the Philistines tested it and found it false (16:6-14). Three separate, confirmed betrayals — and Samson's response to each was not distance but a fourth conversation, ending in the truth she had been paid to extract. This is worth naming plainly

for any relationship today: a pattern of broken trust, tested and confirmed repeatedly, is information. Choosing to keep disclosing yourself to someone who has already shown you, three times over, what they do with what you disclose is not romance. It is the same blindness Samson would soon experience literally.

Delilah's Bought Loyalty

Judges 16:4-5, 18

Delilah's allegiance is never left ambiguous by the text. "The lords of the Philistines came up to her and said to her, 'Entice him, and find out where his great strength lies...and we will give you, every one of us, eleven hundred pieces of silver'" (Judges 16:5). When Samson finally told her the truth, her very next move was to send word to collect payment (16:18). Her relationship with Samson operated, from its very introduction in the text, alongside a competing financial arrangement that had nothing to do with his wellbeing.

This does not require reading Delilah as a cartoon villain to draw the lesson from her story. It requires only noticing what Samson apparently never checked: whether the person he was disclosing his entire life's secret to had any actual investment in protecting what she was being given. A relationship can look and feel like intimacy while one party's loyalty is quietly, structurally, pointed somewhere else entirely.

Strength Outside, Blindness Inside

The chapter's final verse before Samson's capture is its most devastating: "And he did not know that the LORD had departed from him" (Judges 16:20). He woke expecting the same strength as always, unaware anything had changed — and the Philistines who had failed three times finally succeeded, gouging out the very eyes that had first led him toward the Timnite woman and, later, Delilah (16:21; compare 14:1-2). The blindness that ended his story had already begun long before the Philistines made it literal.

PRACTICAL TIP

Grow in Grace Together, Not Just in Appearance

Samson's whole pattern in this chapter began with choosing by what pleased the eye. The corrective Scripture offers is not indifference to appearance — there is nothing wrong with being neatly, elegantly, and pleasantly attired — but a settled refusal to let outward appearance become the main focus, either in choosing a spouse or in sustaining a marriage already begun: "Charm is deceitful and beauty is passing, but a woman who fears the LORD, she shall be praised" (Proverbs 31:30).

The practical alternative Scripture points toward is growth, pursued together rather than separately: adding, as Peter urged, "to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge" and onward through the whole list (2 Peter 1:5-7), and letting "the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom" (Colossians 3:16). A couple who spends real time together in God's word, praying for wisdom and discernment rather than polishing only what can be seen, is building exactly the kind of character Samson's own choices never once screened for. Proverbs names where this all actually begins: "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom" (9:10).

Reflection

1. Have I ever chosen a relationship, or continued one, mainly because someone "pleased me well," without seriously examining their character first?

2. Is there a pattern of broken trust in my own relationship that I have kept excusing rather than treating as the information it actually is?

3. Whose loyalty, in my own life, might be pointed somewhere other than toward my genuine wellbeing — and have I honestly examined that?

Chapter 4

David and Michal: Disrespect and Resentment

David and Michal's marriage did not begin in contempt. It began, unusually for the political marriages of that era, in what Scripture explicitly calls love — and traces, with real precision, exactly how that love curdled into a contempt neither of them ever recovered from.

A Love That Once Was Real

Michal's feelings for David are stated directly, not merely implied by the political arrangement around them: "Now Michal, Saul's daughter, loved David" (1 Samuel 18:20). Their early marriage survived real danger — Michal deceiving her own father's messengers to help David escape a murder attempt (19:11-17) — and real separation, when Saul gave her to another man during David's years as a fugitive (25:44), before David reclaimed her as his wife once he took the throne (2 Samuel 3:13-16). This was not a marriage without cost or complication on either side by the time the moment this chapter focuses on arrives.

Contempt in the Window

David brings the ark of the covenant into Jerusalem with unrestrained public celebration — and Michal's response, watching from a window, is recorded with unusual emotional detail:

> *"...Michal, Saul's daughter, looked through a window and saw King David leaping and whirling before the LORD; and she despised him in her heart."*
> *— 2 SAMUEL 6:16*

When David returns home, Michal does not raise a private concern. She meets him with open sarcasm: "How glorious was the king of Israel today, uncovering himself...as one of the base fellows shamelessly uncovers himself!" (6:20). David's response is sharp in its own right, and the chapter closes on a

line delivered with no further commentary needed: "Therefore Michal the daughter of Saul had no children to the day of her death" (6:23). Whatever else that verse means historically, it marks the moment recorded as the final word on their relationship — contempt expressed once, in public, apparently never repaired.

A Marriage Interrupted Twice

1 Samuel 25:44; 2 Samuel 3:13-16

Between the love recorded in 1 Samuel 18 and the contempt recorded in 2 Samuel 6, Michal's story includes a wound rarely given enough weight: Saul, in David's absence, "had given Michal his daughter to Palti the son of Laish" (1 Samuel 25:44) — a second marriage she had no say in. When David later demanded her back as a condition of political negotiation, Scripture records a detail easy to skip past: "Her husband went along with her to Bahurim, weeping as he went...Then Abner said to him, 'Go, return!' And he returned" (2 Samuel 3:16).

Michal is handed between three men across this span of chapters — given by her father, given again to another man, then reclaimed by David — with her own voice recorded nowhere in any of those transfers. This does not excuse the contempt she later expressed. It does make it considerably less mysterious. A woman who has been treated as a political instrument for most of her adult life, given no space to process any of it, is a woman whose bitterness by the time it finally surfaces has had a great deal of unaddressed material to draw from.

When Respect Erodes

This chapter is not arguing that Michal's contempt was justified, or that David's worship deserved her mockery. It is arguing something both spouses in any marriage need to hear: respect rarely disappears in a single dramatic moment. It erodes, unaddressed grievance by unaddressed grievance, until one ordinary afternoon becomes the place it finally breaks the surface as contempt. By the time Michal spoke from that window, years of unprocessed loss had already done most of the damage.

PRACTICAL TIP

Raise It Small, Before It Grows Loud

Michal's contempt did not appear out of nowhere at that window — it had years of unprocessed grievance behind it, finally surfacing in public, sarcastic form. The practical alternative is simple to state and hard to practice consistently: raise a grievance while it is still small, privately, and soon after it happens, rather than letting it accumulate until it can only come out as contempt.

A useful habit worth adopting deliberately: when something a spouse does genuinely bothers you, name it within a day or two, calmly, and specifically — "when you did X, I felt Y" — rather than filing it away. Grievances that go unspoken do not actually disappear. They wait, the way Michal's did, for a moment when they finally have to be spoken — and by then they rarely come out gently.

Reflection

1. Is there an old wound in my marriage, never fully processed, that keeps quietly shaping how I respond to my spouse today?

2. Have I ever let contempt build silently rather than raising a concern honestly while it was still small?

3. Like David, when my spouse expresses contempt, do I respond in a way that de-escalates, or one that matches it?

Chapter 5

Ahab and Jezebel: Corruption and a Husband's Silence

Jezebel's name has become shorthand for a particular kind of danger, and rightly so. This chapter asks a question her story rarely gets asked on her behalf: what was her husband doing while she did it? The answer, more than her scheming, is what this chapter is actually about.

A King Who Sulked Instead of Led

The trouble begins with a request Ahab could not get his own way on. Naboth refuses to sell his ancestral vineyard, and Ahab's response is recorded with almost comic pettiness for a king: "Ahab went into his house sullen and displeased... and he lay down on his bed, and turned away his face, and would eat no food" (1 Kings 21:4). A grown man, a reigning king, sulking in bed rather than either accepting the refusal or addressing it directly.

A Wife Who Filled the Vacuum

Jezebel does not create the corruption that follows out of nothing. She steps into a leadership vacuum her husband's passivity left wide open:

> *"Then Jezebel his wife said to him, 'You now exercise authority over Israel! Arise, eat food, and let your heart be cheerful; I will give you the vineyard.'" — 1 KINGS 21:7*

What follows is Jezebel orchestrating false witnesses and Naboth's judicial murder, entirely in Ahab's name, using his own royal seal (21:8-14). None of this required Ahab's active participation. It only required his continued silence, which she had every reason to expect, because his silence was precisely what had created the opening for her to act in the first place.

The Cost of a Silent Husband

Ahab's response upon learning Naboth was dead is the chapter's most damning detail: he asked no questions about how, raised no objection to what had clearly been an injustice, and simply "arose to go down to the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, to take possession of it" (21:16). Scripture does not record Ahab ordering the murder. It records something a husband can convince himself is less guilty, and is not: benefiting from a wrong he chose not to ask about.

The Verdict God Still Gave Ahab

1 Kings 21:17-24

God's confrontation, delivered through Elijah, does not address Jezebel first. It addresses Ahab directly: "Have you murdered and also taken possession?...In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth, dogs shall lick your blood, even yours" (1 Kings 21:19). The specific phrase God uses for Ahab's guilt is worth sitting with: "You have sold yourself to do evil in the sight of the LORD" (21:20).

Nowhere in this confrontation does God treat Ahab's passivity as a defense. "My wife did it" was not an available exit from responsibility then, and the principle has not changed since. A husband's silence in the face of a spouse's wrongdoing is not neutral. It is a form of consent, and Scripture holds it accountable as one.

What Active Headship Actually Looks Like

This chapter is not arguing for a husband who dominates or polices his wife's every decision. It is arguing for the opposite of what Ahab modeled: a husband present and engaged enough to ask hard questions, to say "no" to injustice even when it is being done in his name and to his apparent benefit, and to refuse the comfortable silence that lets someone else carry the moral weight of a decision he quietly approves of.

Scripture gives real, positive shape to what this looks like, not only the negative outline Ahab leaves behind. God's own commendation of Abraham, generations before Ahab, credits him with something specific and active: "because Abraham obeyed My voice and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws" (Genesis 26:5). This was not passive compliance. It was a man who had made God's instruction the deliberate, governing rule of his own household, consistently enough that God names it as the reason for blessing an entire generation later. Joshua supplies the clearest single sentence of headship exercised publicly and without apology, at the very moment it would have been easiest to stay quiet and let the surrounding culture decide for him: "As for me and my house, we will serve the LORD" (Joshua 24:15). Notice what Joshua does not do. He does not survey his household for a majority opinion. He does not present serving the LORD as one option among several for his wife and children to weigh for themselves. He declares the direction his house will take, and takes responsibility for having declared it.

This kind of headship is increasingly rare to find modeled today, and the pressure working against it comes from more than one direction at once. Some marriages have simply inverted Ahab's failure, treating a wife as the household's dominant voice of influence by default, with a husband who has quietly resigned his own responsibility to lead. Others have absorbed a different, gentler-sounding version of the same passivity: sincere men, often out of genuine care not to dominate or wound, who have come to believe marriage runs best on a fully equal-share model of authority, with no one actually positioned to give final direction when a hard decision has to be made. In either version, whatever the motive behind it, the practical result looks remarkably like Ahab's own household: a husband who steps back and lets his wife's decisions and actions go unchallenged, even where the consequences are serious, and who then feels strangely unaccountable for outcomes he was actually positioned, the whole time, to speak into. Genesis 26:5 and Joshua 24:15 describe something considerably more demanding than either failure: a man who has made God's own instruction the standard he actually leads by, and who is willing to say so plainly, in front of his own household, before anyone asks him to.

PRACTICAL TIP

Say the Direction Out Loud

Joshua's declaration worked because he actually said it — out loud, specifically, in front of the people it would affect. A practical exercise worth adopting: once a year, or at any major turning point, a husband states plainly, to his wife and children together, what direction he believes God is calling the household toward — not as a unilateral decree closed to discussion, but as Joshua's own household surely discussed it long before he ever spoke the words in 24:15. What matters is that the direction gets said clearly by someone, rather than left to accumulate by default, decision by unspoken decision, until no one can say who actually chose it.

Reflection

1. Is there an area of my marriage or household where I have gone quiet rather than engage, leaving a vacuum someone else has had to fill?

2. Have I ever benefited from a decision I privately suspected was wrong, without asking the hard question that might have stopped it?

3. What would active, engaged leadership — not domination — actually look like in the specific area of my marriage where I have been most passive?

Chapter 6

Solomon and His Many Wives: Compromise and Divided Devotion

No one in Scripture had more wisdom available to protect his marriages than Solomon, and no one's marriages illustrate more clearly that wisdom itself is not a substitute for the specific, deliberate choices a marriage actually requires. His downfall came not from a single dramatic failure but from hundreds of individually defensible compromises, accumulated over a lifetime.

The Wisest Man Who Compromised Anyway

Scripture states plainly what accumulated, and what it eventually cost:

> *"...and his wives turned away his heart. For it was so, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned his heart after other gods; and his heart was not loyal to the LORD his God." — 1 KINGS 11:3-4*

Each individual marriage Solomon entered likely had a reasonable-sounding political justification at the time — alliance, peace, diplomatic necessity. God had addressed this exact temptation directly, generations before Solomon was born: "Neither shall he multiply wives for himself, lest his heart turn away" (Deuteronomy 17:17). Solomon did not stumble into this warning by accident. He had access to it, and compromised past it anyway, one politically sensible marriage at a time.

How Compromise Accumulates

This is worth naming as its own category of danger, distinct from the dramatic betrayals in earlier chapters. Nothing about marriage number twelve, or number two hundred, likely felt like the decisive moment that finally turned Solomon's heart. Divided devotion rarely announces itself as a single choice. It accumulates, compromise by compromise, each one small enough to seem survivable on its own, until a heart that once asked God for wisdom above all things (1 Kings 3:9) ends its story no longer wholly loyal to the God who gave it.

The actual scale of what accumulated is worth stating plainly, because the number itself makes the point better than any commentary could: "he had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines" (1 Kings 11:3). No single one of those thousand relationships was, on its own, the marriage that ruined Solomon. It was the thousandth compromise built on the pattern of the first nine hundred ninety-nine, each one easier to justify than it should have been precisely because so many had already come before it. This is how compromise actually works in an ordinary marriage too, at a far smaller scale: not one betrayal, but a habit of small permissions granted to oneself, each one borrowing its justification from the last.

The Warning That Outlived Solomon

Nehemiah 13:26

Centuries later, Nehemiah confronts the same pattern resurfacing among his own people and reaches for Solomon's story as the definitive cautionary example: "Did not Solomon king of Israel sin by these things? Yet among many nations there was no king like him, who was beloved of his God...nevertheless pagan women caused even him to sin" (Nehemiah 13:26).

What Nehemiah's citation preserves is worth noticing: Solomon's love for God and his wisdom are not disputed even in this later rebuke. "Even him" is the operative phrase — not a lesser man, not someone already spiritually compromised to begin with, but the wisest, most favored king Israel had ever had. Nehemiah's point is precise: no reservoir of wisdom, favor, or past faithfulness makes a person immune to what accumulated compromise can eventually do to a heart.

The Consequence That Followed

Scripture does not leave Solomon's divided devotion without a recorded cost. God's own response, delivered directly to Solomon, is specific about both the judgment and its timing:

> *"So the LORD said to Solomon...'I will surely tear the kingdom away from you and give it to your servant. Nevertheless I will not do it in your days, for the sake of your father David; I will tear it out of the hand of your son. However I will not tear away the whole kingdom; I will give one tribe to your son, for the sake of My servant David.'" — 1 KINGS 11:11-13*

Two things are worth holding together here, because both are true at once. The consequence was real and lasting — the kingdom permanently divided, a wound Israel never fully recovered from. And the consequence was also delayed and softened by grace that Solomon had done nothing himself to earn — postponed a full generation, and never total, purely "for the sake of My servant David." Divided devotion in a marriage rarely announces its bill immediately either. It often arrives later, sometimes in a spouse's generation rather than the compromiser's own, and even then grace tends to soften what compromise actually earned — without ever fully canceling that something real was lost.

Guarding the Heart Deliberately

Solomon's own book of Proverbs contains the instruction his own later life failed to follow: "Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life" (Proverbs 4:23). A marriage protected from divided devotion is rarely protected by one dramatic act of faithfulness. It is protected the same way it is eventually lost — one small, deliberate choice at a time, guarded with the same diligence Solomon commended to others and, in the end, did not fully practice himself.

PRACTICAL TIP

Set the Boundary Before You Need It

Solomon's compromises accumulated one politically sensible decision at a time, each one made in the moment it was needed rather than decided in advance. A practical safeguard many couples never actually put into words: agree together, ahead of time and while both are thinking clearly, on the specific non-negotiables of the marriage — money, faith practices, what entertainment or company is and is not welcome in the home, how far a friendship with someone else is allowed to go.

A boundary decided together in a calm season is considerably easier to hold than one improvised for the first time in the middle of the exact temptation it was meant to prevent. Solomon likely never sat down and decided, in advance, that a thousand marriages would be acceptable. He simply never decided, in advance, where the number would stop — and compromise filled exactly the space that decision was never made to guard.

Reflection

1. Is there a compromise in my own marriage that felt small and defensible when I made it, but has quietly accumulated with others like it?

2. What warning, like Deuteronomy 17:17 for Solomon, have I already been given that I have compromised past anyway?

3. What would it look like this week to guard my heart diligently, in the specific small area where compromise has been easiest?

Chapter 7

Hosea and Gomer: Unfaithfulness and Redemption

This is the most painful chapter in this book, and it is worth saying so plainly before it begins. Hosea's marriage was not a private tragedy that happened to become public record. God commanded it specifically so that Israel could watch its own unfaithfulness acted out, in real time, inside one actual marriage.

A Marriage as a Living Message

The instruction God gives Hosea is startling in its directness:

> *"...Go, take yourself a wife of harlotry and children of harlotry, for the land has committed great harlotry by departing from the LORD." — HOSEA 1:2*

Gomer's unfaithfulness within the marriage that follows is not merely implied. It is the entire point of the book — an illustrated sermon, lived out at real personal cost to Hosea, so that Israel could see its own covenant unfaithfulness to God from the outside, through the eyes of a genuinely wronged husband.

Buying Back What Was Given Freely

By the time Hosea 3 opens, Gomer has apparently left the marriage entirely and fallen into some form of slavery or indentured servitude. God's next instruction to Hosea is the chapter's emotional center:

> *"Then the LORD said to me, 'Go again, love a woman who is loved by a lover and is committing adultery, just as the LORD loves the children of Israel...' So I bought her for myself for fifteen shekels of silver, and one and one-half homers of barley." — HOSEA 3:1-2*

Hosea does not simply forgive from a distance. He goes to wherever Gomer has ended up and pays, personally, to bring her back — a covenant renewed at real, specific, quantified cost to the one who was wronged. This is the clearest picture Scripture offers of what redemption inside a broken marriage can actually look like: not free, not painless, not owed, but pursued anyway.

Gomer: Bought Back, Not Erased

Hosea 3:1-3

It would be easy to reduce Gomer to a symbol and lose the actual woman inside the story. Scripture does not do this. Her unfaithfulness is named honestly — the text does not soften or excuse it — and the cost Hosea pays to redeem her is named just as honestly alongside it. Both things are true in the same account: real betrayal, real redemption, neither one canceling out the reality of the other.

After buying her back, Hosea's instruction to her is specific: "You shall stay with me many days; you shall not play the harlot, nor shall you have a man — so, too, will I be toward you" (Hosea 3:3). Redemption in this account is not a return to how things were before, as if nothing had happened. It is a new covenant, entered deliberately, built on the acknowledgment of exactly what needed to be redeemed.

A Word of Care Before Moving On

This chapter is not a command that every marriage touched by unfaithfulness must reconcile, or that every wronged spouse bears some obligation to pursue what Hosea pursued. Hosea's story is a picture of what God's own covenant love looks like toward an unfaithful people — costly, pursuing, undeserved — not a universal instruction for every marriage in every circumstance, particularly where ongoing danger, abuse, or refusal to repent are present. What this chapter offers is hope that redemption after real betrayal is possible, wherever both people are willing and it is safe to pursue it — not a rule that it must always be attempted.

PRACTICAL TIP

Build Transparency Before Trust Is Tested

Most unfaithfulness does not begin the day it is discovered. It begins earlier, in small, unguarded spaces neither spouse thought to protect. A practical safeguard worth adopting long before it is ever needed: build real transparency into the ordinary rhythm of the marriage — shared visibility into phones, schedules, and friendships, offered freely by both spouses as an expression of trust being built, not demanded by one spouse as suspicion of the other.

This is not the same thing as control, and it should never be practiced as surveillance. It is closer to what Hosea's whole account illustrates in reverse: covenant love that stays close enough, consistently enough, that distance never has room to grow unnoticed in the first place. Guarding a marriage before it is tested costs far less than redeeming one after it has already broken.

Reflection

1. Have I ever experienced or witnessed a costly, undeserved pursuit of reconciliation, the way Hosea pursued Gomer?

2. What would it mean, practically, for love in my own marriage to be modeled less on what is deserved and more on what Hosea 3 describes?

3. Is there a covenant in my own life that needs to be deliberately renewed, named honestly, rather than simply returned to as though nothing happened?

Chapter 8

Ananias and Sapphira: Shared Deception

This final chapter of Part One is the shortest story in this book and, in some ways, the most unsettling. Ananias and Sapphira were not distant, estranged, or contemptuous of one another. They were, by every appearance, a unified couple — united around a lie, which turned out to matter more than the unity itself.

Agreement Is Not Always Good

The early church was marked by radical generosity, believers selling property and giving the proceeds for the community's needs. Ananias and Sapphira sold a piece of property too — with one difference the text is careful to specify:

> *"But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession. And he kept back part of the proceeds, his wife also being aware of it, and brought a certain part and laid it at the apostles' feet." — ACTS 5:1-2*

"His wife also being aware of it" is not incidental detail. It is the verse that makes this a marriage story rather than an individual one. The deception was not Ananias acting alone and hiding it from Sapphira. It was a decision they made and executed together, each one fully informed of what the other was doing.

The Opportunity Sapphira Missed

When Peter confronts Ananias and he falls dead on the spot, Sapphira arrives roughly three hours later, apparently unaware of what has just happened to her husband (Acts 5:7). Peter gives her a direct, specific opportunity many spouses never get after a partner's wrongdoing is already exposed:

> *"...'Tell me whether you sold the land for so much?' So she said, 'Yes, for so much.' Then Peter said to her, 'How is it that you have agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord?'" — ACTS 5:8-9*

Sapphira had a window — unknown to her, but real — to tell the truth independently of whatever her husband had already said. She chose instead to repeat the same lie, uncoerced, on her own initiative. Her judgment did not fall for being married to a deceiver. It fell for personally, separately, choosing to continue the deception when given a direct chance to end it.

Unity Requires Independent Conscience

This account draws a sharp line worth carrying into any marriage: genuine unity between a husband and wife is not the same thing as one spouse automatically ratifying whatever the other has already decided. A marriage strong enough to be called "one flesh" still requires each person to retain enough independent conscience to say "no, that is not true" when the moment calls for it — even, especially, when the other person involved is the spouse they love most. Sapphira's silence was not loyalty. It was complicity wearing loyalty's clothing.

PRACTICAL TIP

Agree on a Truth-Check Signal

Sapphira's failure was not that she lacked a chance to tell the truth. It was that no one, including herself, had ever built in a deliberate moment to actually use that chance. A practical habit worth agreeing on in advance: a simple phrase or signal either spouse can use — a "truth check" — that both have already agreed will always be answered honestly, no matter what has already been said to someone else.

Deciding on this signal ahead of time, before it is ever needed, removes the awkwardness of inventing one in the moment a lie is already in motion. It gives each spouse a way out of exactly the situation Sapphira walked into unprepared — a private door back to honesty, agreed on by both, open at any time either one chooses to use it.

Reflection

1. Is there something my spouse and I have quietly agreed to together that would not survive being said out loud to someone we trust?

2. Have I ever been given a clear, private opportunity to correct a shared deception and chosen instead to repeat it?

3. Do I have enough independent conscience in my own marriage to say "no, that isn't true" to my spouse directly, when it is genuinely called for?

Eight marriages have now been examined for how they came apart — blame, impatience, deception, contempt, silence, compromise, unfaithfulness, and shared deception. Part One closes here. What follows is a different kind of evidence entirely.

Part Two

Marriages That Held

The six marriages ahead faced real pressure of their own — grief, danger, barrenness, risk, the sheer weight of shared responsibility. None of them held together through the absence of hardship. What distinguished them was a shared commitment, practiced consistently in small moments, to everything Part One showed the cost of losing: ownership instead of blame, patience instead of provocation, honor instead of contempt, presence instead of passivity, and truth instead of shared deception.

Chapter 9

Manoah and His Wife: Partnership in Discernment

Samson — a man whose relationships were repeatedly damaged by attraction pursued without discernment — was not raised without a model of exactly the partnership he later failed to practice himself. His own parents showed him, from before his birth, what discernment inside a marriage actually looks like.

An Angel Trusted by a Wife First

The angel of the LORD appears first to Manoah's wife alone, announcing a son who will be set apart from birth. Her report to her husband is careful and complete:

> *"So the woman came and told her husband, saying, 'A Man of God came to me...I did not ask Him where He was from, and He did not tell me His name. And He said to me, "Behold, you shall conceive and bear a son."'" — JUDGES 13:6-7*

Manoah's response to this report is worth noticing for what it is not. He does not dismiss what his wife tells him as unreliable because she alone received it. He does not demand his own separate audience to verify her account before he will believe it. He receives what she says as true, and moves immediately to the next step.

A Husband Who Sought Confirmation, Not Control

Manoah's prayer that follows is a small but telling window into how he understood his own role:

> *"Then Manoah prayed to the LORD, and said, 'O my Lord, please let the Man of God whom You sent come to us again, and teach us what we shall do for the child who will be born.'" — JUDGES 13:8*

"Teach us", not "teach me." Manoah does not ask to receive instructions independently of his wife, as though raising their son were ultimately his decision to make on her behalf. He asks for joint instruction, for both of them together — and God answers that prayer exactly as asked, sending the angel back to appear to them both (13:9-14). Discernment about the child God had promised them was treated, from the very beginning, as shared work.

The Wife Who Steadied Her Husband's Fear

Judges 13:20-23

When the angel ascends in the flame of their sacrifice, Manoah and his wife realize, together, exactly who they have been speaking with. Manoah's response is immediate panic: "We shall surely die, because we have seen God!" (Judges 13:22). His wife's response is calm, specific theological reasoning, offered in the same moment of shared crisis:

"If the LORD had desired to kill us, He would not have accepted a burnt offering and a grain offering from our hands, nor would He have shown us all these things, nor would He have told us such things as these at this time" (13:23). Her logic is sound, drawn from the same events they had both just witnessed, and it immediately settles her husband's fear — the text does not record him arguing back, only the narrative moving forward to Samson's birth in the very next verse.

This is discernment functioning as genuine partnership: not one spouse always being the strong one and the other always needing steadying, but each person contributing exactly the clarity the moment required, and the other receiving it without needing to be right first. Samson, raised inside this partnership, would later choose relationships built on none of it.

PRACTICAL TIP

Schedule the "Teach Us" Conversation

Manoah's prayer asked for joint instruction, not private clarity he alone would carry back to his wife. A practical habit worth building deliberately: set a regular time — weekly or monthly — to pray together specifically over whatever decisions are pending, rather than each spouse deciding separately and informing the other afterward.

This is a small structural change with real effect. Decisions made jointly, in prayer, from the beginning tend to produce exactly the kind of shared ownership Manoah and his wife modeled at the angel's altar — neither one alone in the discernment, and neither one surprised later by what the other had already decided alone.

Reflection

1. When my spouse brings me an important piece of discernment or insight, do I receive it as Manoah did, or do I need to verify it myself before I will trust it?

2. Is there a decision in my life right now that I have been treating as mine alone to make, that actually calls for the "teach us" posture Manoah modeled?

3. Who, in my marriage, tends to provide steadying clarity in a crisis — and do I receive it as readily as Manoah received his wife's?

Chapter 10

Isaac and Rebekah: A Marriage Begun in Answered Prayer

Every marriage in this book so far has been examined mostly for how it went wrong, or, in Manoah's case, for a single moment of strength inside an otherwise ordinary story. Isaac and Rebekah's marriage offers something different: an actual beginning, deliberately built on prayer and discernment before either of them had even met.

A Search Built on Prayer

Abraham sends his servant to find a wife for Isaac among his own relatives rather than the surrounding Canaanite culture (Genesis 24:2-4). The servant's own approach to this enormous responsibility is itself instructive:

> *"...O LORD God of my master Abraham, please give me success this day...Let it be that the young woman to whom I say, 'Please let down your pitcher that I may drink,' and she says, 'Drink, and I will also give your camels a drink'...let her be the one You have appointed for Your servant Isaac." — GENESIS 24:12-14*

The sign the servant asks for is not arbitrary. He is not testing for beauty or wealth, but for a specific, costly generosity — a willingness to draw water not only for a stranger but for ten camels as well, a task that could take considerable time and effort for someone under no obligation to offer it. Character, not appearance, was the quality being searched for from the very first prayer.

Willing and Ready

Rebekah passes this test immediately and without hesitation (24:15-20). When her family, having heard the servant's full account, asks whether she is willing to leave immediately for a husband she has never met, her answer is direct: "I will go" (24:58). No demand for more time, no requirement to meet Isaac first — a genuine willingness to trust a process she had real evidence, by that point, had been guided by God from its very first step.

Isaac's Comfort After Loss

Genesis 24:63-67

The marriage's actual beginning is described with unusual tenderness for the era: "Then Isaac brought her into his mother Sarah's tent; and he took Rebekah and she became his wife, and he loved her. So Isaac was comforted after his mother's death" (Genesis 24:67).

This detail is easy to read past, but it matters. Isaac was not entering this marriage from a position of strength or readiness. He was grieving his mother, and the text explicitly credits his new wife with providing genuine comfort in that grief — not a distraction from it, but comfort within it. A marriage that begins by meeting a real, acknowledged need, rather than pretending neither party has one, has a kind of honesty many marriages take years to develop.

The chapter had opened with Isaac "meditating in the field" at eventide (24:63), a man given to quiet reflection even before he knew his bride was arriving. That same reflective character would go on to shape a marriage built, from its first day, on something steadier than either party's mood.

PRACTICAL TIP

Pray Specifically, Not Just Generally

Abraham's servant did not pray a vague prayer for a good wife. He asked for one specific, observable quality — costly generosity — and let that quality be the actual test. Couples already married can borrow the same discipline for decisions still ahead of them: rather than praying generally for wisdom, name the specific character quality or outcome being sought, together, and let that specific thing be watched for rather than hoped for vaguely.

This applies as much to decisions inside an existing marriage as to choosing a spouse in the first place — a career move, a season of parenting, a relationship to build or release. Specific prayer tends to produce specific discernment. Rebekah's willingness was recognizable precisely because the servant had asked for something precise enough to actually recognize.

Reflection

1. Did my own marriage begin with the kind of prayer and discernment Abraham's servant modeled — and if not, is it too late to build that foundation now?

2. Like the servant's test, what quality am I actually looking for in the people closest to me — character, or something more surface-level?

3. Is there a grief or a need in my own life my spouse could be genuinely comforting, the way Rebekah comforted Isaac, if I let them in on it honestly?

Chapter 11

Boaz and Ruth: Covenant Loyalty and Provision

Ruth's own loyalty to Naomi — “where you go, I will go” (Ruth 1:16) — is often the verse remembered from this book. Less attention usually goes to Boaz, the man whose own steady, costly loyalty met hers and turned a widow's survival story into a marriage that shaped Israel's entire royal line.

Provision Before Any Promise

Boaz's care for Ruth begins long before any romantic possibility is raised. She is a foreign widow gleaning at the edge of his field, with no legal claim on anything beyond what the law required landowners to leave behind. Boaz's instructions to his workers go considerably further than required:

> *"...Let her glean even among the sheaves, and do not reproach her. Also let grain from the bundles fall purposely for her; leave it that she may glean, and do not rebuke her." — RUTH 2:15-16*

This provision came with no expectation of anything returned. Boaz's own explanation to Ruth names exactly what moved him: “It has been fully reported to me, all that you have done for your mother-in-law...The LORD repay your work, and a full reward be given you” (2:11-12). He had noticed her character before he ever considered her as a wife.

Redeeming, Not Just Rescuing

When Ruth later approaches Boaz to request that he act as kinsman-redeemer — a legal role that would require him to marry her and restore her late husband's family line — Boaz does not simply agree privately. He follows the full legal process publicly, at the city gate, giving a closer relative first right of refusal before formally redeeming Ruth and her inheritance himself (Ruth 4:1-10). Doing right by her was never treated as optional or informal. It was pursued through every proper channel, in full view of the community, at real personal cost to his own estate.

A Foreign Widow's Steadfast Loyalty

Ruth 1:16-17; 2:11-12

Ruth's own character deserves its own weight in this story, not only as the reason Boaz noticed her. Her declaration to Naomi, made with nothing to gain and everything to lose by leaving her own people, is one of Scripture's clearest pictures of covenant loyalty: "Wherever you go, I will go; and wherever you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God, my God" (Ruth 1:16).

She made this commitment before she had any reason to expect Boaz, or provision, or a future at all — loyalty offered first, without any guarantee of what it would produce. Boaz's own generosity toward her was, by his own account, a direct response to already having witnessed this same loyalty in action (2:11). Two people, each demonstrating covenant faithfulness before either one required it of the other, is the actual foundation this marriage was built on.

PRACTICAL TIP

Name What You Notice, Before It's Romantic

Boaz's generosity toward Ruth began with a specific, spoken observation of her character — he told her plainly what he had noticed about her loyalty to Naomi, well before there was any romantic expectation attached to saying so. A simple, durable practice: notice a spouse's good qualities specifically, and say them out loud, not only in general praise but naming the actual action observed.

"I noticed how patient you were with the children tonight" does more for a marriage over years than "you're a great parent" ever will, because it proves the noticing was real. Boaz's specificity is what made his praise land as sincere rather than flattering — worth remembering the next time a spouse's good character deserves to be named out loud.

Reflection

1. Have I ever provided for or protected someone, the way Boaz did for Ruth, with no guarantee of anything returned?

2. Is there a commitment in my marriage I have kept informal or private that would actually be strengthened by doing it properly, publicly, the way Boaz did at the city gate?

3. What does covenant loyalty, offered before it is required of me, actually look like in my own marriage right now?

Chapter 12

Elkanah and Hannah: Patience Through Grief

Barrenness in the ancient world carried a weight difficult for many modern readers to fully appreciate — social shame, a sense of failed purpose, and in Hannah's specific household, a rival wife who used that pain as a weapon year after year. Elkanah's response to his grieving wife is worth close attention precisely because it was not a fix. It was presence.

A Household Divided by Provocation

Elkanah had two wives, Hannah and Peninnah — Peninnah had children, Hannah had none, and Peninnah made sure Hannah felt the difference constantly: "And her rival also provoked her severely, to make her miserable, because the LORD had closed her womb...So it was, year by year, when she went up to the house of the LORD, that she provoked her; therefore she wept and did not eat" (1 Samuel 1:6-7). This was not a single hard season. It was a repeated, deliberate pattern, sustained over years.

A Husband Who Chose Tenderness Over Fixing

Elkanah's response to his weeping wife is recorded directly:

> *"Then Elkanah her husband said to her, 'Hannah, why do you weep? Why do you not eat? And why is your heart grieved? Am I not better to you than ten sons?'" — 1 SAMUEL 1:8*

Elkanah could not fix Hannah's barrenness, and Scripture does not record him pretending otherwise or offering some solution of his own devising. What he offers instead is presence, genuine questions, and a clear statement of his own love for her regardless of what she could or could not provide. This is not a perfect line — it does not erase Hannah's grief, and the text does not suggest it should have — but it is the response of a husband who chose tenderness toward a pain he could not repair, rather than distance from a wife whose grief

made him uncomfortable.

The Vow Elkanah Honored

1 Samuel 1:21-23

When Hannah finally prays her own vow — promising that if God gives her a son, she will give him back to the LORD's service for his entire life (1 Samuel 1:11) — and later conceives Samuel, Elkanah's role in what follows is easy to overlook. Hannah tells him she will not go up to the yearly sacrifice until the child is weaned, so she can present him permanently at the tabernacle afterward. Elkanah's answer is brief and complete: "Do what seems best to you...only let the LORD establish His word" (1:23).

A vow that would ultimately cost Elkanah his only son by his most beloved wife, given permanently into someone else's household, is not a small thing for a husband to simply support without objection. He does not renegotiate her vow or ask her to reconsider. He honors it, trusting that whatever cost it carried for their own household was worth what Hannah had promised God in her deepest grief.

PRACTICAL TIP

Ask Before You Fix

Elkanah could not fix Hannah's barrenness, and Scripture never records him pretending otherwise. A simple habit worth adopting when a spouse is hurting over something that cannot actually be solved: ask directly, "do you want me to help fix this, or do you just need me to listen right now?" before launching into solutions.

Most of what damages a moment like this is not a lack of care. It is a mismatch — one spouse offering solutions to a pain that only wanted presence. Elkanah's own question, "Am I not better to you than ten sons?", was not a fix. It was presence, offered plainly, and it is worth asking directly which one a hurting spouse actually needs before assuming.

Reflection

1. When my spouse is grieving something I cannot fix, is my instinct to offer presence, the way Elkanah did, or to distance myself from what makes me uncomfortable?

2. Is there a provocation, like Peninnah's, that my spouse faces repeatedly that I could be actively shielding them from?

3. Has my spouse ever made a costly commitment I was asked to simply support, the way Elkanah supported Hannah's vow? How did I actually respond?

Chapter 13

Priscilla and Aquila: Partnership in Purpose

Every marriage examined so far in this book has been described mostly through a single defining moment or crisis. Priscilla and Aquila are different: Scripture never records a dramatic turning point in their story at all. What it records instead, across multiple books and years, is simple consistency — a husband and wife named together, repeatedly, doing the same work side by side.

Named Together, Every Time

Priscilla and Aquila appear in Acts and in three of Paul's letters, and in nearly every instance, Scripture names them as a pair rather than mentioning one without the other:

> *"...he found a certain Jew named Aquila...with his wife Priscilla...and because he was of the same trade he stayed with them and worked; for by occupation they were tentmakers." — ACTS 18:2-3*

They shared a trade, a household, a ministry, and eventually a reputation significant enough that Paul singles them out by name for commendation: "Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, who risked their own necks for my life" (Romans 16:3-4). Whatever that specific danger was, it was a risk this couple apparently took together, as a unit, rather than one spouse acting while the other stayed safely uninvolved.

Teaching Together, Correcting Together

One specific scene shows this partnership in direct action. Apollos, a gifted and eloquent teacher, arrives in Ephesus preaching accurately but incompletely — he knew only the baptism of John. Priscilla and Aquila's response is recorded as a shared act: "When Aquila and Priscilla heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately" (Acts 18:26). Neither spouse corrects Apollos alone. Both are named, together, doing the actual work of instruction — a level of shared theological competence and shared willingness to engage difficult conversation that neither one is recorded practicing without the other.

A Church That Met in Their Home

Romans 16:3-5; 1 Corinthians 16:19

Paul's letters record something else consistent about this couple: wherever they lived, a church gathered in their house. "Greet Priscilla and Aquila...Likewise greet the church that is in their house" (Romans 16:3, 5). Writing again from a different city later, Paul notes the same pattern: "Aquila and Priscilla greet you heartily in the Lord, with the church that is in their house" (1 Corinthians 16:19).

This detail says something specific about how this marriage functioned. Their home was not simply a shared residence separate from their calling. It was the actual site of their shared ministry, repeatedly, across multiple relocations — Rome, Corinth, Ephesus. Wherever this couple moved, the same pattern of shared purpose moved with them, suggesting a partnership built on something considerably more durable than any single location or circumstance.

PRACTICAL TIP

Find One Shared Project

Priscilla and Aquila's partnership was not built on household logistics alone. It was built on a shared trade and a shared ministry — work they actually did together, repeatedly, across multiple cities. A practical step worth taking deliberately: identify one shared purpose, however small, that both spouses actively work on together — not chores divided between two people, but a genuine joint project with a shared goal.

This could be a ministry, a business, a cause, or something considerably smaller — what matters is that it is shared, not merely coordinated. Couples who share only logistics tend to drift into functioning as two efficient roommates. Couples who share an actual purpose tend to function like Priscilla and Aquila did: named together, wherever life takes them.

Reflection

1. Do my spouse and I have a shared purpose or calling we work at together, the way Priscilla and Aquila shared a trade and a ministry?

2. Is there a difficult conversation or correction I have been avoiding that my spouse and I could approach together, the way this couple approached Apollos?

3. What would it look like for our own home to become a site of shared purpose, the way Priscilla and Aquila's home became a gathering place for the church?

Chapter 14

Jehoiada and Jehoshabeath: Shared Courage

This chapter closes Part Two with a direct counterpart to Chapter 8: a couple united around a dangerous, costly truth, rather than a lie small enough to seem survivable, and the very different thing that kind of unity is capable of producing.

A Massacre and a Hidden Infant

When King Ahaziah of Judah dies, his mother Athaliah — daughter of the notorious Ahab and Jezebel — seizes the throne for herself by ordering the execution of her own grandsons, the royal heirs who stood between her and power. One infant survives, hidden by his own aunt:

> *"But Jehoshabeath, the daughter of the king, took Joash the son of Ahaziah, and stole him away from among the king's sons who were being murdered, and put him and his nurse in a bedroom. So Jehoshabeath...wife of Jehoiada the priest (for she was the sister of Ahaziah), hid him from Athaliah so that she did not kill him." — 2 CHRONICLES 22:11*

Jehoshabeath was Athaliah's own stepdaughter, and Ahaziah's sister — meaning the risk she took was not abstract. It was a direct defiance of a woman who had already shown she was willing to kill her own grandchildren to secure power, carried out by a member of that same family with every reason to understand exactly what discovery would cost her.

Six Years of Shared, Silent Risk

Jehoshabeath's act of hiding Joash was only the beginning. Her husband Jehoiada, as high priest, then sheltered the child inside the temple itself for six full years while Athaliah reigned, unaware the rightful heir was still alive (2 Chronicles 22:12). This was not a single brave moment either spouse could have carried out alone. It required Jehoshabeath's initial courage to remove the infant from a massacre in progress, and Jehoiada's sustained courage, position, and discretion to protect him for six consecutive years without exposure — two different forms of risk, contributed by two different people, sustained together across years rather than a single afternoon.

The Coup a Husband Organized

2 Chronicles 23:1-15

In the seventh year, Jehoiada moves from hiding Joash to actively restoring him. He organizes commanders, Levites, and family heads, arms them within the temple precincts, and orchestrates Joash's public coronation as king — a carefully planned action that ends with Athaliah's own execution and the boy king, now seven years old, formally established on the throne (2 Chronicles 23:1-15).

None of this would have been possible without Jehoshabeath's original act six years earlier. Her husband's later organizational courage depended entirely on her initial physical courage in the moment of the massacre itself. Neither spouse's contribution was lesser than the other's — one saved a life in an instant of crisis; the other protected and eventually restored that same life through years of sustained, careful risk. Their marriage's most consequential work was never accomplished by either of them alone.

What United Truth Can Accomplish

Ananias and Sapphira's shared unity, examined in Chapter 8, cost them everything because what they were united around was a lie. Jehoiada and Jehoshabeath's shared unity preserved an entire dynasty because what they were united around, at genuinely greater personal risk, was a costly truth worth protecting. The same principle runs underneath both stories: a marriage's unity is only ever as good as what it is united around.

A Truth Not Immediately Evident

There is a deeper significance to this couple's courage that is easy to miss reading the account quickly. God had promised David that his throne and lineage would endure forever (2 Samuel 7:12-16), and that promise was ultimately pointing toward the Messiah, who Scripture repeatedly identifies as a direct descendant of David. Athaliah's massacre of the royal heirs looks, on the surface, like ordinary political ambition — a woman securing a throne by removing every rival. Read against the larger promise, it looks like something considerably darker: an attempt to sever the Davidic line before it could ever produce the Messiah at all.

This would not be the only time in Scripture that the line leading to the Messiah faced an attempt at total destruction. Pharaoh ordered every Hebrew male infant killed in the days before Moses' birth, threatening the very deliverer God had already appointed (Exodus 1:15-16). Centuries later, Herod ordered the massacre of every male child in Bethlehem under two years old, trying to eliminate the infant Jesus along with every child who might have been Him (Matthew 2:16). Athaliah's attempt against Joash sits in exactly this same pattern — not an isolated act of political violence, but one more attempt in a long, recurring effort to sever the promised line before its purpose could be fulfilled.

Seen this way, Jehoiada and Jehoshabeath's shared courage was never only a matter of two people doing the right thing for one endangered child. It positioned them, together, as willing tools in something considerably larger than their own household — the preservation of a promise stretching forward to humanity's own deliverance. A marriage united around the right thing, even

when neither spouse can see the full reach of what that unity is actually protecting, can become exactly this kind of instrument: two ordinary people, doing what was simply right in front of them, unknowingly safeguarding something that would matter to every generation after their own.

PRACTICAL TIP

Decide Your Non-Negotiables Together, in Advance

Jehoiada and Jehoshabeath did not have the luxury of deciding, in the moment of crisis, whether they were the kind of couple willing to take this risk. Their courage worked because the values behind it were almost certainly settled long before the massacre began. A practical step worth taking while life is calm: identify together, explicitly, the handful of moral lines your marriage would hold even at real cost — the things worth risking comfort, relationships, or security to protect.

Deciding this in advance, together, means neither spouse has to discover in the middle of a crisis whether the other is actually willing to stand with them. Jehoiada and Jehoshabeath's shared courage was possible because, when the moment came, there was apparently no debate about whether the child was worth protecting — only about how.

Reflection

1. Is there a costly truth or a right cause my spouse and I have been avoiding uniting around, out of fear of what it might cost us?

2. Like Jehoiada and Jehoshabeath, does my marriage divide risk and responsibility according to what each of us is actually positioned to contribute?

3. What is my own marriage's unity currently built around — and would I be proud of it if it were examined as closely as this chapter examines Jehoiada and Jehoshabeath's?

4. Is it possible that some ordinary act of faithfulness in my own marriage is serving a purpose neither of us can yet see the full reach of?

Part Three

What Scripture Commands, and What It Means to Build

Fourteen marriages have now been examined through narrative. The three chapters ahead turn from story to direct command — what Scripture asks of a husband and a wife independently, the specific pitfalls capable of sabotaging either calling, and a closing chapter gathering every thread into something practical enough to carry forward.

Chapter 15

What Each Spouse Owes God, Not Each Other

Fourteen marriages have now been examined through story — through blame, impatience, betrayal, contempt, silence, compromise, unfaithfulness, shared deception, and on the other side, discernment, prayer, loyalty, patience, partnership, and courage. This chapter turns from narrative to direct command, because Scripture does not leave what a husband and wife owe each other to inference from stories alone. It states it plainly, and it states it to each spouse separately.

Two Commands, Not One Conditional Exchange

Paul's most complete instruction on marriage addresses husbands and wives in the same passage, but not with the same conditions:

> *"Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord...Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her." — EPHESIANS 5:22, 25*

Notice what is missing from both halves of that instruction: any conditional clause linking one spouse's obedience to the other's. Paul does not write "wives, submit to your husbands once they have earned it by loving you well," and he does not write "husbands, love your wives once they have earned it by submitting." Each command is addressed independently, and each carries its own accounting — a wife submits "as to the Lord," not as to her husband's performance; a husband loves "as Christ loved the church," not as a reward for his wife's cooperation. Waiting for the other spouse to go first was never the actual instruction.

Answering the Strongest Objection Honestly

This chapter owes its reader an honest look at the verse that most complicates the reading just given, rather than quietly stepping around it. The sentence immediately before "wives, submit to your own husbands" reads: "submitting to one another in the fear of God" (Ephesians 5:21). In the Greek, verse 22 has no verb of its own — it borrows its command directly from verse 21. Some readers take this to mean Paul is describing fully mutual, interchangeable submission running in every direction between spouses, with headship dissolved into a shared, undifferentiated authority.

The verse deserves to be taken seriously rather than explained away, and the honest answer is found in what verse 21 actually introduces: a household code covering three separate relationships in a row — wives and husbands, children and parents, servants and masters (5:22–6:9). Every one of those three pairs is treated asymmetrically. Children are told to obey their parents; parents are never told to obey their children. Servants are told to serve their masters; masters are told to treat servants justly, never to serve them in return. Paul's own parallel letter to the Colossians runs the identical structure (Colossians 3:18–4:1). If "submitting to one another" meant fully reciprocal, interchangeable submission in every direction, every one of these three pairs would need a matching command running the other way — and none of them do, in either letter.

The more consistent reading is that verse 21 names the spirit that should run through an entire Spirit-filled household — mutual consideration, humility, a refusal to treat one's own position as license for selfishness — and the specific instructions that follow are how that spirit gets lived out inside roles that remain genuinely distinct. Paul makes this same combination explicit elsewhere in a single breath: "Woman is not independent of man, nor man of woman, in the Lord...but all things are from God" stands directly beside "the head of woman is man" in the very same passage (1 Corinthians 11:3, 11-12). Scripture's own answer to whether headship and genuine mutual need can coexist is yes — stated plainly, in the same sentence, by the same author.

It is worth adding, too, that Paul knew exactly how to write true, word-for-word bidirectional mutuality when that is actually what he meant.

He does so explicitly just one letter earlier: "The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. And likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does" (1 Corinthians 7:4). That verse states real, equal reciprocity, plainly, without ambiguity. Its very existence makes the consistent asymmetry everywhere Paul addresses household authority — never once a matching command for husbands to submit to wives, across multiple letters to multiple churches — look deliberate rather than accidental. Genesis 2:18-24 grounds this same distinction before the fall ever occurs, and 1 Timothy 2:13 grounds it explicitly in the order of creation rather than merit, competence, or culture: "Adam was formed first, then Eve." Headship, on this reading, was never a concession to sin. It was there from the beginning, and the fall did not introduce it — it corrupted it into the domination Genesis 3:16 describes.

What a Husband Owes God

Scripture is specific about what this looks like in practice, not only in general terms of love:

> *"Husbands, likewise, dwell with them with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered." — 1 PETER 3:7*

This verse ties a husband's own spiritual life directly to how he treats his wife — "that your prayers may not be hindered" is not a minor closing remark. Paul adds his own instruction in the same direction: "Husbands, love your wives and do not be bitter toward them" (Colossians 3:19), and elsewhere names the specific obligation a husband owes his wife's body as much as she owes his: "Let the husband render to his wife the affection due her" (1 Corinthians 7:3). None of this is presented as optional generosity. It is presented as what a husband owes, regardless of how his wife is currently treating him.

What a Wife Owes God

The instruction to wives is equally specific, and equally unconditional on the husband's behavior:

> *"Wives, submit to your own husbands, as is fitting in the Lord." — COLOSSIANS 3:18*

"As is fitting in the Lord" places the same accountability on a wife's obedience that Ephesians 5:22 already established — this is fitting because of who the Lord is, not because of how well her husband currently deserves it. Peter adds a striking detail: even a wife married to a husband who does not obey God's word can, through her own conduct, "win him without a word...when they observe your chaste conduct accompanied by fear" (1 Peter 3:1-2). Paul, writing to Titus, names the practical shape of this calling directly: to "love their husbands, love their children...be discreet, chaste, homemakers, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be blasphemed" (Titus 2:4-5). Her obedience, like his, is owed regardless of whether her husband has yet earned it.

It is worth pausing on how deliberately this instruction is echoed rather than stated only once. Peter's charge to wives in 1 Peter 3:1-6 was written independently of Paul's letter to the Ephesians, almost certainly to a different, wider audience — believers "scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia" (1 Peter 1:1) — and yet it lands on the same substance as Ephesians 5:22-24: submission offered as to the Lord, chaste and reverent conduct, and a wife's calling described in nearly identical terms. Two apostles, writing to two different regions, neither one simply repeating the other's letter, were given the same charge to deliver. When Scripture confirms a single instruction through more than one witness this consistently, it is worth treating as more than coincidence — evidence of exactly how much weight God placed on this particular charge, given through two separate apostles rather than left to rest on one.

Accountable to God, Not Contingent on Each Other

This is worth returning to every earlier chapter in this book through. Adam's failure in Chapter 1 was not that Eve sinned first. It was that he, independently, failed to own his own part. Elkanah's strength in Chapter 12 was not contingent on Hannah ever being able to give him what Peninnah could — he loved her regardless. Every marriage examined so far in this book, whether it broke or held, ultimately came down to whether each spouse treated their own obedience to God as their own responsibility, or as a transaction waiting on the other party's compliance first. Scripture never offers the second option as legitimate.

The Proverbs 31 Woman

Proverbs 31:10-31

This woman's industriousness is often what readers remember first — she rises while it is still night, manages a household, trades profitably, clothes her family well, and works with willing hands (Proverbs 31:13-27). But the chapter's own summary of what actually made her praiseworthy is not her productivity:

"Charm is deceitful and beauty is passing, but a woman who fears the LORD, she shall be praised" (31:30). Everything else in the passage — her skill, her strength, her business sense, her generosity to the poor — flows from this one root, not the other way around. A wife modeling herself on this passage is not primarily chasing efficiency or household output. She is chasing the reverence for God that made all the rest of it meaningful.

It is worth adding what the chapter says about her husband, too: "Her husband is known in the gates, when he sits among the elders of the land" (31:23). His own standing benefits directly from the household she has built — her fear of the Lord and his public honor are not separate outcomes, but the same household bearing fruit in both directions at once.

Christ the Bridegroom

Ephesians 5:25-27; John 13:13-15; Matthew 16:23

Paul does not simply tell husbands to love their wives. He gives them a specific, named model: "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her...that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle" (Ephesians 5:25-27). Self-sacrifice and purifying, patient care toward growth are both named as part of the same love.

This is not, however, a model of authority dissolved into equal partnership. Christ Himself, in the very chapter where He kneels to wash His disciples' feet, makes no attempt to set aside His own position while doing it: "You call Me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for so I am" (John 13:13). He served from underneath His authority, not by surrendering it. A husband modeled on Christ is called to the same combination — real headship, exercised through sacrifice and service rather than domination, but headship all the same. Chapter 5 of this book already showed what a husband's abdication of that responsibility actually costs a household; this is not a call back toward that same passivity dressed up as humility.

Christ's love for those under His care did not exclude correction, delivered plainly and sometimes sharply, when it was needed. To Peter, a disciple He loved, He said in a moment of real rebuke: "Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men" (Matthew 16:23). Correction like this rarely feels pleasant to receive, in Scripture or in a marriage, and it is not offered here as license for harshness. It is offered as evidence that headship modeled on Christ includes real correction in love, not only gentleness — and that one thing a husband's authority never covers is any instruction that would place him, or ask his wife to place him, above God's own word. Submission "as to the Lord" has never once meant submission above the Lord.

Reflection

1. Have I been treating my own obedience to what Scripture asks of me as unconditional, or as something I am waiting for my spouse to earn first?

2. Like the Proverbs 31 woman, is the fear of the LORD actually the root of my own character, or is it something further down the list, beneath skill or productivity?

3. If I am a husband: does my leadership look more like Christ's combination of authority and service, or like Ahab's abdication of both? If I am a wife: is my submission genuinely "as to the Lord," or contingent on my husband earning it first?

Chapter 16

Pitfalls That Sabotage the Harmony God Designed

Marriage is not, in Scripture's own estimation, a merely human arrangement God tolerates. It is a covenant He personally witnesses and cares about: "The LORD has been witness between you and the wife of your youth...yet she is your companion and your wife by covenant" (Malachi 2:14), and "Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled" (Hebrews 13:4). Precisely because God holds marriage in that regard, this chapter names plainly what tends to sabotage it — not to hand either spouse a weapon against the other, but so that each can recognize the danger in their own hands before it does its damage.

Withholding What Is Not Your Own to Withhold

Before this chapter divides into pitfalls specific to each spouse, one danger belongs to both equally, addressed by Paul in strikingly symmetrical language:

> *"...The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. And likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. Do not deprive one another except with consent for a time, that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again, so that Satan does not tempt you because of your lack of self-control." — 1 CORINTHIANS 7:3-5*

Paul states the same principle twice, once for each spouse, refusing to let either one claim unilateral ownership of their own body within the marriage. The only exception named is deliberate, mutual, temporary, and purposeful — agreed fasting and prayer, not withheld as punishment, leverage, or silent protest. Withholding used as a weapon, however common it may be in practice, has no scriptural cover here at all.

Pitfalls That Can Sabotage a Husband's Calling

Scripture names several specific failures a husband is capable of, each one undermining the headship he is called to exercise well. Bitterness: "Husbands, love your wives and do not be bitter toward them" (Colossians 3:19). Dishonor and a refusal to understand: the failure 1 Peter 3:7 warns hinders a husband's own prayers. Failure to provide: "If anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever" (1 Timothy 5:8). Treachery against the marriage covenant itself: "Let none deal treacherously with the wife of his youth...take heed to your spirit, that none deal treacherously" (Malachi 2:15-16). And the passivity already examined at length in Chapter 5 — a husband present in title but absent in the actual leadership his household needed from him.

Pitfalls That Can Sabotage a Wife's Calling

Scripture is equally direct about the dangers on the other side of the marriage. Contention, named repeatedly and vividly: "Better to dwell in a corner of a housetop than in a house shared with a contentious woman" (Proverbs 21:9), and again, "a continual dripping on a very rainy day and a contentious woman are alike; whoever restrains her restrains the wind, and grasps oil with his right hand" (27:15-16) — an image of something that cannot actually be contained no matter how hard one tries. Tearing down what should be built: "The wise woman builds her house, but the foolish pulls it down with her hands" (14:1). And idleness paired with its frequent companion: "They learn to be idle, wandering about from house to house, and not only idle but also gossips and busybodies, saying things which they ought not" (1 Timothy 5:13).

One Standard, Not a Weapon

This chapter's purpose is easy to misuse, and worth guarding against directly. None of these lists were given by Scripture as ammunition for one spouse to recite against the other during an argument. They were given, the way every other chapter in this book has tried to model, as a mirror each person is invited to examine themselves in first — the same posture Chapter 1 already argued for, owning one's own part before naming anyone else's.

Reflection

1. Have I ever withheld physical affection from my spouse as leverage, punishment, or silent protest, rather than for the narrow purpose 1 Corinthians 7:5 actually names?

2. Which of the pitfalls named in this chapter, honestly, is the one I am most tempted toward — and have I been examining it in myself, or watching for it in my spouse instead?

3. Is there a way I have already, even unintentionally, used something in this chapter as a weapon rather than a mirror?

Chapter 17
Building a Marriage That Holds

Fourteen marriages have now been examined — eight in Part One that broke under pressures every marriage eventually faces in some form, and six in Part Two that held under similar pressures and grew stronger for it. Two further chapters, Chapters 15 and 16, turned from narrative entirely to name what Scripture commands directly, spouse to spouse, regardless of how the other is currently behaving. This final chapter gathers all four threads into something a reader can actually carry forward into an ordinary Tuesday.

What These Marriages Actually Teach

A pattern runs underneath every marriage in Part One that is worth naming plainly: none of them broke over a single catastrophic event. Adam and Eve's marriage cracked over blame reached for instead of ownership. Abraham and Sarah's cracked over one impatient decision that took years to fully cost them. David and Michal's cracked over contempt that had clearly been building long before it surfaced. Even Ananias and Sapphira's final, fatal deception was very likely not their first small dishonesty with each other, only the one that was finally tested and found wanting. Marriages rarely fail all at once. They fail the way a rope frays — one strand at a time, until the strand that finally gives was never actually the only one already weakened.

The marriages in Part Two share the opposite pattern. Manoah and his wife, Isaac and Rebekah, Boaz and Ruth, Elkanah and Hannah, Priscilla and Aquila, Jehoiada and Jehoshabeath — none of them held together through the absence of hardship. Every one of these marriages faced real pressure: grief, danger, barrenness, risk, the sheer weight of shared responsibility. What distinguished them was not an easier path. It was a shared commitment, practiced consistently in small moments, to precisely the postures Chapters 15 and 16 named directly — ownership instead of blame, patience instead of provocation, honor instead of contempt, presence instead of passivity.

Communication Without Contempt

Michal's story in Chapter 4 offers this book's clearest single picture of what contempt does to a marriage once it is given voice. Paul's own instruction names the alternative directly: "Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers" (Ephesians 4:29). This is a considerably higher bar than simply avoiding cruelty. It asks whether a given word actually builds up the person receiving it, or merely relieves the person speaking it.

PRACTICAL TIP

Complaint Speaks About an Action. Contempt Speaks About a Person.

A practical marker, drawn from everything this book has already covered: contempt speaks about a spouse's character — "you always," "you never," "what is wrong with you" — while honest complaint speaks about a specific action and its effect. "That hurt me" and "you are hurtful" are not the same sentence, and a marriage's long-term health often depends on which of the two gets practiced under pressure.

Correction Received in Love

Every marriage will, at some point, require one spouse to correct the other. Scripture is direct about both halves of this exchange. On receiving: "Whoever loves instruction loves knowledge, but he who hates correction is stupid" (Proverbs 12:1), and "Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful" (27:6) — correction offered in genuine love, however unwelcome it feels in the moment, is a mark of care rather than attack. On giving: "Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted" (Galatians 6:1). Correction that forgets its own capacity for the same failure has already stopped being gentle, whatever tone of voice it is delivered in.

A Practical Marriage Check

This book has resisted turning any single chapter into a checklist, because a marriage examined only by checklist tends to produce compliance without the actual change of heart every chapter has argued for instead. What follows is a short set of questions, gathered from threads already run through this entire book, worth returning to honestly rather than treating as a pass or fail test:

1. Ownership (Chapter 1): When something goes wrong between us, is my instinct to own my own part first, or to explain my spouse's part first?

2. Patience (Chapter 2): Is there a promise or a prayer I have grown impatient with, tempted to solve my own way rather than wait on God's timing for it?

3. Respect (Chapter 4): Is there an old, unaddressed grievance quietly eroding the respect between us before it ever surfaces as open contempt?

4. Presence (Chapter 5): Is there an area of our marriage where I have gone silent rather than engaged, leaving a vacuum someone or something else has filled?

5. Unconditional obedience (Chapter 15): Am I treating my own obedience to what Scripture asks of me as unconditional, or as something I am waiting for my spouse to earn first?

Five questions, returned to honestly and often, will do more for a marriage than any single dramatic gesture — because a gesture can be performed once and forgotten, and every one of these questions was built specifically to be asked again.

Closing — The Two Commandments Applied to a Home

This book opened with God's own description of what marriage actually is: "a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh" (Genesis 2:24). It closes with Christ's own summary of everything Scripture asks of anyone, applied directly to the smallest and most demanding community most people will ever belong to:

> *"You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind...And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'" — MATTHEW 22:37-39*

A husband who loves God will find it considerably harder to sulk his way into Ahab's silence, or compromise his way into Solomon's divided devotion. A wife who loves God will find it considerably harder to let contempt do to her marriage what it did to Michal's, or provocation do what it did to Peninnah's household. And any spouse who has genuinely learned to love their spouse as themselves — the same instinctive care each person already extends toward their own needs, their own dignity, their own second chances — has already recovered most of what Adam and Eve lost in a single afternoon, and most of what every marriage in this book was actually reaching for, whether it reached successfully or not.

No marriage in this book was perfect, including the ones that held. What distinguished them was never the absence of failure. It was a willingness, spouse by spouse, to keep returning to these two commandments after every failure — which is, in the end, the same invitation open to any marriage reading this book today.

Personal Reflection

Ten questions. Sit with them slowly, together if you can.

1. When something goes wrong between us, is my first instinct to own my own part, or to explain my spouse's part?

2. Is there a promise, a prayer, or a season I have grown impatient with, tempted to solve my own way rather than wait on God's timing for it?

3. Have I ever chosen or continued a relationship mainly because someone pleased me well, without seriously examining their character?

4. Is there an old, unaddressed grievance quietly eroding respect in my marriage before it ever surfaces as open contempt?

5. Is there an area of my marriage where I have gone silent rather than engaged, leaving a vacuum someone or something else has filled?

6. Is there a compromise that felt small and defensible when I made it, but has quietly accumulated with others like it?

7. Am I treating my own obedience to what Scripture asks of me as unconditional, or as something I am waiting for my spouse to earn first?

8. Which of Scripture's named pitfalls, honestly, am I most tempted toward — and have I been examining it in myself, or watching for it in my spouse instead?

9. Do my spouse and I have a shared purpose we work at together, the way Priscilla and Aquila shared a trade and a calling?

10. Standing before Christ's two great commandments, what would our marriage look like a year from now if both of us genuinely lived them out?

Final Word

No marriage is too far gone for these two commandments to still reach it.

This book opened with a question every marriage eventually asks in one form or another: can this actually hold? Seventeen chapters later, the honest answer Scripture gives is neither a guarantee nor a shrug. It is an invitation — the same invitation Adam and Eve were given the moment after their own first failure, the same invitation Hosea extended to Gomer at real personal cost, the same invitation available to any two people willing to keep choosing it.

Marriage was never meant to run on the fumes of a wedding day's emotion. It was meant to be built, deliberately, the way every marriage that held in this book was built — one act of ownership instead of blame, one act of patience instead of provocation, one act of presence instead of silence, repeated for as many years as God grants.

If your own marriage is closer to Part One of this book than Part Two right now, that is not the end of the story it can still become. Grace met Gomer in the marketplace she had been sold into. It is available to your marriage in whatever condition it is actually in today.

Build the marriage worth holding — one honest day at a time.

About the Author

Oludare Akinbo is a Christian author with about 20 years of pastoral experience spanning Nigeria, the Republic of Benin, Togo, and Ghana. He is based in Lagos, Nigeria, and currently serves as MD/CEO of Tishri Infotech Nigeria Ltd, a Health and IT consultancy firm. His IT experience spans the private and public sectors, including multinational companies. He holds a BSc (Hons) in Biochemistry from Lagos State University (LASU) and an MSc in Biochemistry from the University of Ibadan, and an MSc in Information Science from the University of Salford, UK, and is a Chartered Management Consultant (CMC) and a member of the Computer Professionals of Nigeria (CPN).

Writing began, in part, as catharsis — a way to process the devastating loss of his late wife, Oluwatohungbogbo Tolulope Akinbo (RN, RN-MW, RN.Ophth, BSc; 1977–2024), to leukemia — a woman he loved for almost thirty years and was married to for twenty-four of them. Out of that season grew a wider practice: he writes Scripture-based devotional and theological works exploring modesty, family, marriage, grief, forgiveness, and the quiet architecture of a heart being shaped by God, distributing them freely through his website and in print through Amazon KDP and Selar. His other titles include *Modesty: Covering the Heart, Guarding the Body*, *The Functional Family: Imperfect People, Held Together by Grace*, *Immortality: Gift or Birthright?*, *Yet Will I Trust Him*, and *Finding God in Grief*, among others.

He lives in Lagos with his wife, Ruth Chidinma Morenike Akinbo, and their children, Oluwadurotiwa, Olaoluwatomiwale, and Oluwanifewa. His full library of free devotional titles, along with correspondence information, is available at **oludareakinbo.com**.

Other Books by the Author

All titles below, along with *How to Strengthen Your Marriage*, are available freely at **oludareakinbo.com**, and in print through Amazon KDP and Selar.

- *Modesty: Covering the Heart, Guarding the Body*
- *The Functional Family: Imperfect People, Held Together by Grace*
- *Coping with Grief: A 52-Week Devotional to Finding God in Grief*
- *The Spirit of Ephraim: Favored, Yet Lacking Courage*
- *The Wisdom of God vs. Man: Where the Bible and Science Meet*
- *Entrusted: A Critical Look at What God Gives Us, How We Handle It, and the Responsibility to Be Faithful*
- *Immortality: Gift or Birthright?*
- *Yet Will I Trust Him*
- *A Friend Loves at All Times*
- *Finding Love Again*
- *A Teachable Heart*
- *Set a Guard*
- *Raising Children Who Fear God*
- *How to Love Someone Hard to Love*
- *That They May Be One*
- *Truth Without Love Can Destroy More Than Lies*
- *A Bruised Reed and A Smoking Flax*
- *Thou Shalt Prosper*
- *Owe No Man Anything But to Love*
- *The Sacred Numbers*
- *Few, Little, Small*
- *Refined, Not Ruined*
- *The One Qualified to Throw a Stone Didn't*
- *Finding God in Grief*
- *A Woman Was Never Meant to Be Decorative*