

Firewall Your Marriage

**A Biblical and Practical guide to a Proactive and
Healthy relationship**

Franky Fernandes



Firewall Your Marriage

By Franky Fernandes

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Dedicated to:

*Shabeena, my beautiful wife, who is truly the only inspiration to
write this book.*

*Neysa and Areta, our sweet daughters and gems of our life,
whom we want to carry on this legacy.*

Foreword

I have known *Firewall Your Marriage* author Franky Fernandes for the last fifty years. We grew up in the same apartment building in Mumbai. I came to the Lord first and then led Franky to the Lord. As a pastor now serving in the USA, very seldom have I seen such a quick spiritual transformation and growth in spiritual maturity, a work of grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Franky was teachable, humble, and passionate to learn about the Lord. In a short time, he started mentoring others and became a resource for the UESI student ministry, teaching and preaching at student camps.

But God also gave Franky Fernandes another passion. Having had to fight for his marriage and eventually succeed, he proceeded to fight for the marriages of others by teaching and counselling couples in large seminars and one-to-one counselling settings. I have closely witnessed Franky's holistic growth in the Lord, his career, his marriage, and his family life. Out of all the above, perhaps his growth in his married life has impacted and blessed me the most.

As a pastor serving in a Christian & Missionary Alliance

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church in the USA, in particular the inner-city borough of Staten Island, New York City, I have seen first-hand the impact of dysfunctional and broken marriages on families and children, which in turn has led to the devastation of whole communities. The breakdown of marriage has left behind a trail of generational dysfunction, mentally and emotionally unhealthy, angry children and adults, failure in schools, a pandemic of absentee fathers and single-parent homes, domestic violence against both children and intimate partners. You will therefore understand the reason why I wholeheartedly endorse this book.

Firewall Your Marriage has been in the making for the last ten years. May God bless all those who were instrumental in giving input into Franky's marriage because this book would not have been written if not for their input into the lives of Franky and his wife. May God bless as well Franky Fernandes for investing his time and effort in writing this book.

No marriage is perfect, and just as we have to work hard in all other areas of our lives and relationships, God is calling us to work on our marriages. We may ignore working on other issues of life. But ignoring issues in marriage leads to devastating consequences, as mentioned above. Over the past thirty-two years as a believer in Christ and almost thirty years of marriage, I have read many books on marriage. But seldom have I seen all the principles of marriage presented so well together in one book. *Firewall Your Marriage* book is not just theory but contains very practical principles that are simple to understand and to put into practice in our day-to-day married life.

My prayer is that this book will heal and revive the marriages of all who get it, read it, pray it, practice it, and teach it. A small spark is enough to light a whole forest. By God's blessing, may this book *Firewall Your Marriage* light a spark leading to a revival in many marriages across many continents.

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John Saldanha

Senior Pastor

New Hope Community church of the Christian and
Missionary Alliance

Acknowledgments

My wife and I are thankful to:

‘Our Mom,’ Mrs Kumudini Subhan. She is first my mother then mother-in-law. She sponsored the editing of ‘Firewall your marriage’ without which we could not have produced this book in the shape and form it is right now.

Ark Family Ministries, the reason for our enriched marriage. Brother Jayaraj and Sister Kailas taught us to how to enrich our married life through their teaching, which eventually resulted in this book. We are truly indebted to them and their ministry to us. Their experiences with many married couples and their own exemplary marriage shaped this book.

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Jeanette Windle, editor of this book, whose knowledge both on the subject and Scriptures and her editorial skills have made this book an easy and pleasant reading.

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“What if we separate?” Sharon asked Mark.

Mark’s eyes widened. “Why would we separate? I love you so much!”

Sharon and Mark had been married for six years. He’d just returned from work, and his wife’s question had taken him by surprise. With a reassuring smile, he hugged her tightly.

Sharon was in deep shock because she’d just learned that her friend Alia had gotten a divorce. This made her anxious about her own marriage with Mark, which had been on the rocks many times in the past. Tears streamed down her face as she hugged her husband back. “Mark, I don’t ever want to separate. Can you give me a guarantee we will never separate?”

Guaranteed uncertainty and false hopes

You wouldn’t buy a refrigerator or television without a warranty that guarantees the product will work or your money back. Yet despite the uncertainty of this world, many people want to jump into marriage without any guarantee their marriage will last. They feel an irresistible attraction and are

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sure they are in love with the other person. So they enter marriage with excitement and dreams of a great future, assuming they will stay together for the rest of their lives. When that doesn't happen and the marriage falls apart, the pain of separation is huge.

An analogy would be buying your dream car, a Ferrari 812 Superfast sports car with a 12-cylinder engine. You look forward to driving this car for the rest of your life. Unfortunately, just a few weeks after purchasing the Ferrari, you have a terrible accident. The Ferrari is crushed along with your dreams. You barely survive the crash but will live the rest of your life with permanent scars. How devastating! How did this happen to you? Was there some fool-proof way to have prevented this accident?

Statistics of divorce and separation

The divorce rates in the United States and many other regions globally, especially Europe, is approaching fifty percent or even higher according to some statistics. In some countries like India where I live, statistics tells us that divorce rates are as low as one percent. Does that mean we are any better at maintaining good marriages? Absolutely not. Divorce statistics only cover those cases where spouses have legally separated from each other. They don't touch upon married couples who have been emotionally separated for years but are still living under one roof.

I wish I could say such marriages are a negligible statistic, but I've seen and spoken with too many such couples. Let's go back to that Ferrari 812 Superfast. This time you haven't crashed your dream car. But instead of racing along at two hundred to three hundred kilometres per hour, your powerful V12 engine can only putt along at twenty to thirty kilometres

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per hour. Its shameful performance is so embarrassing you can't enjoy the ride.

That's the reality of many marriages. Instead of achieving the optimum performance a bride and groom dreamed of on their wedding day, they are barely functional. So frustrating! Why does this happen? Is there some fool-proof way to prevent this?

Our story and their story

For the first two years of our marriage, my wife and I were sailing happily on our dream ship. Then we were faced with sudden unexpected storms, much of it beyond our control. On the one hand, we had a dream of a beautiful marriage. On the other hand, we were sinking hopelessly. I loved my wife, and she loved me. But we had no clue about the future of our rocky marriage.

2004 became a turning point in our marriage. By this time, we'd been married three years and had our first daughter. One day, a friend invited us to a marriage enrichment cell meeting organised by Ark Family Ministries, a Christian ministry focused on building strong marriages and families in India. We gladly accepted the invitation. To our surprise, we found many families just like us. We found hope!

Over the course of those monthly meetings, my wife and I learned many core teachings and values, most of which are a part of this book. Gradually day by day, we could see the storms in our marriage subsiding. We also learned how to manage the storms. There are still occasional small storms and will be for the rest of our lives. But we are now confident that the boat of our marriage will not sink. We are also enjoying sailing together in our boat.

In 2008, seven years into our marriage, my wife asked me one morning, "How do we protect our marriage?"

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What followed was a highly emotional discussion and brainstorming on how to protect our marriage. In the process, we stumbled upon some amazing insights. Little did we know we would one day be teaching those principles and in time write a book on marriage. But as we started applying them, our marriage became stronger, which in turn increased our confidence in these principles.

In 2010, we started teaching through this same ministry as other people began inviting us to share our insights on how to protect marriage. We originally termed our message “A Secured Connection in Marriage.” Then one day I met with a friend from the IT department of the asset management company we both worked for.

“I am responsible for the firewall of our company’s network,” he told me. “We must constantly monitor our network from hackers and other intruders.”

As he explained about the role of a firewall, I realised our marriages also need a firewall to protect us from dangers lurking outside and struggles within us. My wife and I began calling our teaching sessions “Firewall in Marriage.” We committed ourselves to prayer that God would build a firewall for our own marriage and others.

This initiated a series of events that led to helping, counselling, coaching, and building other families even as we were building our own. Our eyes were opened to the many marriages within the church and outside that were breaking, hurting, bleeding right before our eyes, and we felt the burden getting heavier. We became convinced there is no better way than building a firewall for the marriage.

Over the last few years since we felt called by God to write *Firewall Your Marriage*, my wife and I have interviewed many married couples, young and old. We have learned some valuable lessons. We have also interviewed family counsellors who

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shared with us their personal stories as well as stories (anonymously) of families they have counselled. We have included these stories throughout this book as examples to which readers can relate.

So by now you may be wondering what is a firewall in marriage. Simply put, it is a biblical and practical way to proactively live a healthy marriage, which in turn safeguards your marriage from separation. And not just legal or physical separation but emotional separation. This is vital because if you can protect your marriage from emotional separation, physical separation is impossible.

Firewall Your Marriage covers three specific pillars that if applied to your marriage will ensure you never separate or even lose the joy of marriage. On the contrary, you will have an exciting, amazing, fulfilled marriage you will want to share with others. My wife and I have applied these principles to our own marriage for thirteen years. We have also taught these principles to other couples, and we now share them with you.

Let me add here that there are numerous methods one might come up with to safeguard a marriage. What my wife and I share here is our own perspective, and I won't call this the ultimate word on marriage. Many great books and teachings on marriage have already been written. In fact, their contributions to this subject have greatly impacted our own lives and marriage, and we are thankful to those authors.

My wife and I celebrated our twenty-first anniversary—not just of marriage but an exciting, amazing, and fulfilling marriage. We remain confident in the security of our marriage, knowing that as long as we take care of these three pillars, the firewall of our marriage will not be breached and we will never separate, not even emotionally, until death do us apart. We look forward to inviting you along with us on this journey as we

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explore together God's wonderful design for your marriage and ours.

Mark and Sharon

Pulling himself away from their embrace, Mark looked down at his wife. Without wasting a second, Sharon asked another pertinent question. "Do you really love me and promise to live the rest of your life with me?"

"Yes, I love you," Mark replied tenderly, wiping away Sharon's tears. "And come what may, I promise you that I will do whatever I can to protect and defend this marriage."

Section One:

IDENTIFYING THE PROBLEM AND CONSEQUENCES

This section will provide insight into the root of marriage problems, the patterns often seen in marriages that separate, and the consequences of separation.

1. Why Protect Marriage?

“Nita, I’ve decided to end our marriage,” said Jim. “I’m living with Sarah now, and I’d like to complete the formalities as soon as possible.”

Married for two decades, Jim and Nita had a son and daughter together. Nita had always considered their marriage to be a blessed one until she received Jim’s call from Sarah’s home. Unable to speak, she lowered the phone in her hand and stood staring at the wall in disbelief.

Nita had always been confident that her marriage would never break. In fact, she refused to accept it. She took these broken pieces to God in prayer. After all, God had joined Nita and Jim in marriage, and Nita believed strongly that only God could break the marriage. She asked her Christian friends to pray for the situation while she continued to pray and also to fast for the restoration of their marriage.

One Saturday evening about six months after Jim had left her for another woman, Nita heard the doorbell ring. Opening the door, she saw Jim standing on the front step with his head down and a bag of his belongings in one hand. Speaking barely

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above a whisper, he said remorsefully, “I am so sorry I hurt you, Nita! Will you please forgive me?”

With tears of joy, Nita forgave him and invited her husband back into their home. It became clear that Jim was sincerely repentant. Although not easy, the next few years they rebuilt their marriage together. Years have now passed since that day, and Jim and Nita have rekindled their lost love.

God’s flawless design

Despite knowing that her husband had left her for another woman, why did Nita refuse to accept it? Why did she feel so strongly that her marriage was worth defending?

Marriage is not a relationship created by an earthly designer. It was designed in heaven by God himself. There is no greater joy in any relationship than a healthy marriage. Nita had enjoyed her married life all these years and considered it to be a gift from God. She’d prepared for this relationship. When she saw her marriage being ruined before her very eyes, she refused to accept it. She wanted back that which God had gifted her. She had become one with her husband, and she couldn’t imagine anyone else in her life.

Nita also knew that a broken relationship could inflict harmful psychological effects on her children. She didn’t want to live as a single mom. She knew her children needed a father. Ultimately, her patience, persistence, and purity paid off.

We see God’s divine design for marriage from the very beginning of creation when God creates the first man Adam, then creates the first woman Eve as his perfect companion.

*Then the Lord God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper who is just right for him.” . . .
So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep.*

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While the man slept, the Lord God took out one of the man's ribs and closed up the opening. Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib, and he brought her to the man. "At last!" the man exclaimed. "This one is bone from my bone, and flesh from my flesh! She will be called 'woman,' because she was taken from 'man.'" This explains why a man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, and the two are united into one.
(Genesis 2:18-24, NLT)

God in his infinite wisdom created a woman as a suitable, equal, and complementary companion for man to fulfil his purpose of procreation, subduing, and ruling over the earth (see also Genesis 1:26-28). Can God ever make a mistake? Absolutely not! Jesus referenced this very passage from Genesis when teachers of the law asked him if they should be allowed to divorce their wives for any reason.

"Haven't you read," he [Jesus] replied, "that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,' and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'? So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate."
(Matthew 19:4-6, NIV)

God divinely designed this relationship of marriage for our enjoyment and good. This is why Jesus commands us in the above passage to defend this age-old institution and not make it a frivolous relationship that can be broken at will. We can trust God to have made something as perfect as himself. How then can we allow that "one flesh" God has joined together to separate?

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For our fulfilment

No other relationship can bring the ultimate pleasure and joy that marriage brings. No wonder it has stood the test of time, culture, civilisations, and kingdoms. There is really no replacement for marriage. Today many couples do everything that happens within a marriage but simply give it a different name, whether a casual “friends with benefits” relationship or living together outside of marriage.

Why does a man and a woman want to come together? Because it satisfies the deepest longing of both the man and woman. You can only share your deepest emotions with someone as close as your spouse who loves you. True sexual fulfilment only comes through a union between man and woman. It was to this part of God’s original design for marriage that Jesus referenced when he stated, “So they are no longer two, but one flesh” (Matthew 19:6, NIV).

Good of the society

A family is the bedrock of a society. A happy, fulfilled marriage is the best thing that can happen to any society in the world at any given point in time. Dr. James Dobson, well-known Christian author, psychologist, and founder and president of the James Dobson Family Institute that produces the radio program, ‘James Dobson’s Family Talk’ emphasises the importance of strong families.

It’s been said that strong families represent the ground floor, the foundation, for a stable and well-ordered society. It’s true. So much of what brings happiness and well-being, especially to the children, depends on committed individual family units. That’s why serious social problems are inevitable when marriages begin to

Why Protect Marriage?

deteriorate. When a society is populated by millions of strong, stable families, there is less poverty. Children are healthier and do better in school. Violence and psychiatric illness are less common. But in the absence of healthy marriages and commitments to children, societies begin to unravel.

The 2003 National Survey of Children's Health (NSCH), carried out in the United States by the National Centre for Health Statistics and representing a total child and teen population of almost fifty million, demonstrated that families with both biological or adoptive parents present in the home have the highest quality of parent-child relationships. Adolescents from intact families also commit fewer violent acts of delinquency and have correspondingly lower arrest rates.

The book *Case for Marriage* is based on the authoritative research of family sociologist Linda J. Waite, journalist Maggie Gallagher, and a number of other scholars. Their findings tell that married people live longer, have better health, earn more money, accumulate more wealth, feel more fulfilment in their lives, enjoy more satisfying sexual relationships, and have happier and more successful children than those who remain single, cohabit, or get divorced. They are also less likely to commit crimes, undergo arrest, or end up in prison.

The impact a good marriage can have on a society is immeasurable and often intangible. Research and data only prove that what God began in the garden of Eden remains the best that can ever happen for his created world.

Harmful effects of divorce on the couple

There is absolutely no doubt that divorce affects both the man and woman. This includes both physical and psycholog-

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ical effects. According to one study published in *Journal for Men's Health*, divorced couples suffer major health issues compared to those happily married, including weakened immune systems, higher incidences of cancer and heart attacks, and much higher mortality rates. Emotional effects include guilt, stress, depression, insomnia, substance abuse, and identity crisis. The Holmes and Rahe Stress Scale cites the death of a spouse as the most stressful life event contributing to illness, followed by divorce as the second most stressful event.

Not all divorced couples go through the same issues and stress. Nevertheless, a certain level of shattering and tearing can be expected no matter how carefully a divorce is handled. After all, marriage is an invisible union between a man and woman, and divorce tears apart that union.

With such inevitable damage, shouldn't a marriage be defended with all that's possible? Why would you want a marriage, either yours or someone else's, to go through such trauma?

That said, there is no doubt that in certain cases divorce may result in a positive impact on one spouse or both. The most common example would be an abusive marriage where one spouse is physically abusing the other. Likewise marriages where a spouse is physically abusing the children or placing them in harm due to extreme alcohol and/or drug, or other dangerous behaviour. In such cases, physical separation may be necessary in order to protect the abused spouse and/or children from harm, especially when the abuse has reached a level where it can be life-threatening. But even if separation or divorce is the result of exceptional circumstances, the breaking of the marriage bond still leaves a painful scar.

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Divorce rates in subsequent marriages

Having tasted the joy and pleasure of marriage and the innate need to have a companion, most divorced people remarry. But if divorce rates are as high as fifty percent in many countries, divorce rates for a second or third marriage are even higher. Simply put, if someone couldn't make their first marriage work, why would they believe they can make a second marriage work?

Bottom line, if a couple chooses divorce as the best solution for growing discord in marriage, remarriage is not the logical next step leading to a better life. If divorce takes a major toll on a couple, getting divorced a second or third time is no less than a huge personal tragedy. So saving the first marriage remains the best solution.

Protecting children from the effects of divorce

The negative effects of divorce on children is one reason many unhappy couples don't divorce or choose to delay separation. But discord in the marriage can be so annoying and distressing that couples eventually decide to separate even knowing the effect this will have on their children. While the couple may justify that divorce was the best option for their marriage, they can't deny this is the worst thing for their helpless children.

As I write this, I can imagine the pain my children would go through if my wife and I divorced. When our marriage was going through some conflict, I remember one of my two daughters telling me, "We both pray that you and Ma will never divorce."

Divorce brings both short-term and long-term effects on the children. Behavioural problems, mental health issues, poor academic performance, hatred for parents, feeling guilty that

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they could be the reason for divorce, substance abuse, and early sexual activity are but a few of the harmful effects on children. Studies demonstrate that separation from fathers is also associated with a higher number of sexual partners in adolescence.

Since divorce often leads to a second marriage, in many cases children have to face a new parent. While not all stepparents treat their stepchildren badly, there is no denying that many do, and certainly a stepparent can't replace the love of the child's own parents. Since a high percentage of such remarriage ends in another divorce, this complicates the children's home-life even further, the rippling effects of which will be felt many years later.

For children to grow up into physically and emotionally healthy adults, they need both parents. A happy marriage gives a lot of security and stability to children.

Bad marriages take a toll on the couple and children

While physical separation has long-term adverse effects on a couple and their children, let me make emphatically clear that a bad marriage can also be very harmful, if not in the same measure. For example, if the marriage is lacking in emotion or communication, there will be no transparency, trust, or motivation to do anything together as a couple. A marriage that is dominated by constant angry conflict also has an adverse effect on the health of the couple as well as those in their circle of influence, including children.

According to one *Guardian* article, researchers at the universities of Nevada and Michigan in the United States did research on three hundred-seventy-three heterosexual couples over the first sixteen years of marriage. The study found that marital conflict adversely affected the health of both husbands

Why Protect Marriage?

and wives, although the impact was greater among men. This included damaging reactions in the body such as inflammation, changes in appetite, increased release of stress hormones, as well as reduced heart function and immune systems. Much like divorce, bad marriages also have negative long-term effects on the children, including emotional insecurity, poor academic performance, anxiety issues, mood problems, and mental health problems.

A legacy for future generations

Whether good or bad, your marriage will leave a long-term legacy in your children's lives. The state of their parents' relationship isn't something that can be hidden from children. Even infants or toddlers can tell if their parents are happy with each other. As children grow from toddlers to teenagers to adults, those memories will be forever ingrained in their minds. If they grow up witnessing a loving, godly marriage, then when they begin looking for their own life partners, they will seek to find one like their parents.

The opposite is also true. If the children have witnessed an unhappy, failed marriage, they will want to never have a spouse like their parents. In some cases, they will choose never to marry in order to avoid such unhappiness.

Just imagine what unspoken legacy your happy marriage can leave behind. Simply avoiding a divorce isn't all that matters but also the quality of your marriage. If you want to leave a positive legacy that will be passed on to future generations, then your marriage must one that has been safeguarded from harm and completely secured behind the firewall of marriage.

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Mark and Sharon

Mark had just started reading a book on living a proactive and healthy marriage, which promised to protect the marriage from emotional and physical separation. He was eager to share with his wife what he'd discovered. That evening when Mark and Sharon had finished dinner, he asked, "Do you know why couples separate?"

"There could be many reasons, I guess," Sharon responded. "But why are you asking me? Do you know the answer?"

Raising her eyebrows, she added, "Is our marriage safe?"

"Don't worry, our marriage is safe," Mark reassured her. "And you are right. There are many reasons why couples separate."

Sharon smiled. "I knew I was right. I'm always right even when you think I'm wrong."

Sharon and Mark both chuckled. Then Mark went on eagerly, "But did you know that all these reasons have a pattern?"

"So what are these reasons?" Sharon asked immediately. "And what is the pattern? I'd really like to know."

With a grin, Mark got to his feet. Pulling him back with a smile, Sharon raised her voice. "I want to know *now*!"

Mark sat down again with a broad smile on his face. "Okay, let me share what the pattern is that this book talks about."

2. Patterns In Separation

Dr John Gottman from the Gottman Institute has studied thousands of couples in order to develop a model that predicts divorce with ninety percent accuracy. Among other things, he has pinpointed four specific negative communication patterns that are precursors of divorce— criticism, contempt, defensiveness, and stonewalling. He calls these four patterns “the four horsemen of the apocalypse.” According to his study, contempt is the most destructive of the four.

Several other research articles on this topic cite many different reasons for divorce. The most common include financial problems, infidelity, lack of communication, unrealistic expectations, lack of intimacy, physical and verbal abuse, inability to resolve conflicts, lack of forgiveness, lack of respect, lack of trust, and poor mental health.

What does all this really point to? These are not unique experiences only a few couples go through. All couples go through similar circumstances in life. There may be certain unique challenges a particular couple faces, but those are not what leads to divorce.

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Nor is lack of compatibility a major cause for divorce. Most couples have some form of incompatibility. In fact, there is no such thing as perfectly compatible couples or the term that has been so popularized in modern media—soul mates. The well-known American evangelist Billy Graham once stated, “I think that there is some merit to a description I once read of a married couple as happily incompatible.”

One young couple named Daisy and Jonathan fell in love while both attended their church youth fellowship. After a year of waiting, they got married. Jonathan had many friends and continued to spend much time with them after marriage. He also began drinking alcohol with his friends, which took Daisy by surprise.

“I didn’t know you drank,” Daisy told him in a shrill voice one day when he came back inebriated from an outing with his friends. “I hate that!”

Jonathan ignored Daisy and continued his behaviour. She began feeling that he loved his friends more than her, and she was heartbroken. One day she told him, “I’ve had enough of this. I want a divorce.”

Jonathan was shocked at her words. He assumed Daisy wasn’t serious about getting a divorce. He immediately stopped going out with his friends and started paying attention to her. But Daisy had closed herself to him. Church friends, parents, and others tried to talk to her, but she had made up her mind. Later that year, they divorced.

What causes an attractive couple who fell in love to separate so soon? Would you call Jonathan selfish and Daisy unforgiving? Hearing these and other such stories first-hand brings a sense of shock and pain.

Patterns In Separation

Identifying the Patterns

What is the pattern that affects such couples? There is no problem with the design of marriage. Our perfect Creator, God Almighty himself, is the designer. Nor is it life circumstances or some conjured-up insurmountable incompatibility. So what is the problem?

Just look closely at your own marriage. The problem is not somewhere outside but within the four walls of your marriage. The problem is always with the couple. If the couple were perfect spiritually, emotionally, and mentally, there would be no issue. They would live happily ever after without a single problem.

But we know that isn't possible as long as we are here on this earth. All marriages are imperfect because two imperfect people come together in an imperfect relationship in the pursuit of making it perfect. We all know this, but we still get married for all the pleasure and comfort it promises. We don't recognize that there is a potential problem residing within us.

In fact, this problem is two-fold. First, our own shortcomings. Second, our lack of understanding of our marital duties towards our spouse as well as a lack of knowledge about our spouse. In the remainder of this chapter, we will look at some of the major shortcomings people tend to struggle with. These are not an exhaustive list but will help us understand the consequences these shortcomings can have on our marriage. In the next chapter, we will take a look at our marital duties, knowing our spouse, and the consequences of neglecting either of these two areas.

Lust and addiction

Lusting constantly and uncontrollably over someone of the opposite sex can eventually lead to infidelity in marriage.

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Lusting is sin just like actual adultery. In fact, if you are engaging in lust, you have already committed mental adultery as the Lord Jesus told his disciples in his well-known Sermon on the Mount.

But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.” (Matthew 5:28, NIV)

It is just a matter of time and the right opportunity before the person engaged in lust moves on to actual adultery. This is a serious problem for men especially because they tend to be attracted primarily through their eyes. YouTube, Netflix, Amazon Prime, and other such channels offer an abundance of temptation. Too many families are hooked by these services.

Some people get married thinking that marriage will solve their problem of lust. It may help but won't solve this problem completely. Pornography is one of the biggest destroyers of marriage, and many young married men and some women are hooked on pornography. Even after marriage, many find it hard to give up their addiction.

Patrick Fagan, PhD senior fellow and director of the Marriage and Religion Research Institute (MARRI), carried out a major study on the effects of pornography in marriage. His conclusions led him to call pornography a “quiet family killer.”

Many divorces could have been prevented if the problem of lust was addressed. Take a young couple named Rohan and Deepa. After falling in love with Deepa and getting married, Rohan thought he wouldn't have to depend on porn material anymore. He was wrong.

Rohan realised that his problem of lust had damaged his thinking and feeling about the sexual relationship. His addic-

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tion took him to a deeper level of depravity, and he started connecting with women who charged for intimacy. One day Deepa found out about his infidelity. It took months of therapy, rehabilitation, and prayer for Rohan to come out of this addiction. Deepa's patience and love gave him the space to recover.

Although not sexual in nature, another common addiction that has destroyed marriages across the globe is alcoholism. Addiction to alcohol affects many areas of a person's life and eventually ruins a happy marriage. Even though the man or woman may love their spouse, this addiction causes helplessness.

Lack of forgiveness

Amit and Sarita had been married for one year. They constantly fought for any number of reasons. One day after a fight, Sarita packed her bags and left home, telling Amit, "I am going to my parents' home, and I'm never coming back."

Sarita had done this a few times in the past, but this time was different. After several months, she still hadn't returned. Finally on Amit's request, their church friends intervened and arranged for a meeting at a church member's home to sort out their differences. During the meeting, Amit chose to open a Pandora's Box of grievances. "Do you guys know that Sarita had several boyfriends before we got married and she hid this from me?"

Amit shared these things to prove that he was right and Sarita was in the wrong. But his revelations made Sarita very bitter, and she was unable to forgive him. Amit and Sarita have now been living separate lives for several years.

Many marriages have fallen apart for the simple reason that the husband and wife cannot forgive each other. This isn't necessarily over major mistakes or hurts. It is often small hurts

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carried forward day after day. For many years, the couple live under the same roof with bitterness piling up until one day it tears the marriage apart like a pipe bursting.

It is common sense that we all do wrong and are in need of forgiveness. Sadly, the hurt we receive always seems bigger than the hurt we have caused.

Habitual Anger

Anger is a common emotion for most of us and can sometimes get out of control. But consistent, uncontrolled anger by one spouse or both is something that can destroy a marriage. If one spouse is often angry, the other person lives in constant fear and hurt. It is not a pleasant place to live in and not a healthy relationship in which a good marriage can grow.

A common church friend was responsible for arranging a marriage between Joe and Ella. Both felt it was God's will that they should be married. Both had good jobs and worked hard during the day. By night, they would both be tired. Initially, things looked fine. But as days turned into weeks, responsibility for the home became a big stumbling block.

Though both worked, Joe expected Ella to do all the housework and often unleashed his frustrations on her. "Ella, a clean house is the least a man should expect from his wife!"

After some time when the housework remained out of control, Joe slapped Ella. The next day, she shared with her church friends what had happened. Later that week, they received marriage counselling together. But Joe continued to display outbursts of anger. One day when she couldn't bear it anymore, Ella left to her parents' home in a different city. She decided to separate and never wants to see Joe again despite his efforts to reconcile.

You marry to have a companion who will love you and

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build you up. Anger breaks you down not once but often during the life of the marriage. The partner who frequently gets angry finds it hard to control their emotions and continues attempting to dominate until the relationship reaches a breaking point. Many marriages have come to a premature end because of uncontrolled anger. Even men and women with much credibility in the church and workplace due to their other strengths have succumbed to this particular weakness.

Love of money

Bill was brought up in a conservative home where money was scarce and spending tightly controlled. In contrast, Leah was raised in a home where spending was never an issue. After Bill and Leah were married, they soon discovered they were opposites when it came to spending. Leah would often go shopping and spend frivolously. Soon, she had piled up massive debt on her credit card. This led to bitter fights.

“If you continue with this behaviour, I will leave you,” Bill threatened.

But Leah was hooked on spending and just couldn’t stop. Their financial situation grew more and more precarious until Bill couldn’t take it anymore. He eventually chose to separate from Leah.

Love of money and a materialistic lifestyle is another issue with a huge potential to break up a marriage. In fact, financial problems are often the biggest source of conflict in many marriages. One major problem when it comes to money is the ownership issue. Whose money is it, and who should be in control?

James worked as an accountant in a pharmacy company. His wife Hannah worked for an IT company. Soon after they returned to their new home from their honeymoon, James told

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Hannah, “I will use my money to pay bills. You can use your money to buy groceries.”

Hannah agreed to this plan. One day at the dinner table, James demanded heatedly, “Why are you behaving like a miser? Why can’t you buy more non-vegetarian food? What good do you think you’re doing by saving all your money?”

“What if you leave me?” Hannah responded in anger. “I’m saving my salary to ensure I have a secure future.”

A resource that was intended to help a family meet their needs had become a stumbling block because of the love for money.

Selfishness

Whether or not we are married, selfishness is probably our most common shortcoming. This is because we are naturally selfish right from birth. Our parents may do their best to train us not to be selfish, but selfishness remains as a core part of our character and manifests especially in marriage.

In fact, we often marry because of selfish reasons. Much of our secret thoughts revolve around “I.” I want to have pleasure in marriage. I want things to be just the way I like. I want to spend money according to my own plans and desires.

Selfishness can be a trait for both spouses. The problem is when selfishness hurts our spouse or deprives the other partner of basic rights. Selfishness can lead to domination and an unhealthy obsession with yourself. This in turn leads to stress for the partner who is on the receiving end. Infidelity is also ultimately the result of selfishness. The spouse who commits adultery is thinking of their own pleasure, not of what their spouse will endure because of their unfaithfulness.

Sometimes selfishness garbs itself in a spiritual disguise. Aaron was married to Hannah for ten years, and they had one

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daughter. Aaron always had time for his job, church ministry, and spiritual activities. But he completely neglected his wife, daughter, and home. Hannah finally grew so frustrated she decided to give up on their marriage.

Calling her church pastor for help, she poured out her pain. "Aaron acts so spiritual, but he only thinks about himself. His ministry, his job, his spiritual life are all that's important in this home. He is completely blinded to my needs or those of our daughter."

Fading love

Many marriages start off well until the couple falls out of love. Before marriage, they may say to each other, "I love you dearly." Do they mean it? Yes, they undoubtedly mean it at the time. But like perishable food, that love has an expiry date. After the first few months or a year, the "fresh" love felt during the dating or engagement period begins to fade and eventually becomes stale and harmful.

Sadly, we often love because of what we get out of it. While we don't say it aloud, what we really mean is, "What's in it for me?" We love because she is so beautiful or because he is so handsome. The woman loves out of desire for a romantic relationship. She wants the man to take her out for dinners, spend time looking into her eyes, and listen to her. The man loves because he wants to enjoy the sexual pleasures marriage allows him to experience with the woman.

But if the woman doesn't receive that romantic experience, her love for the man fades. If the woman can't meet the man's needs or no longer looks as beautiful as when he first saw her, his love fades. This is a selfish love.

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Lies and deception

Lying is such a common shortcoming that many people don't consider it as sinful as lust or anger. In fact, some people don't see it as particularly wrong at all. But trust is the foundation of a good marriage, and lying destroys that trust. Trust is like the interest your money receives from the bank. If no interest is received, your money gradually erodes in value due to inflation.

Similarly, if you can't trust your spouse, the marriage relationship will never grow but will eventually erode. If one or both spouses frequently lie, even about seemingly harmless things, that is enough to breed constant suspicion between the couple.

Spouses often lie to the other to cover up other issues. For example, if a spouse is having an affair, they will lie. If the spouse is spending excessively and credit card bills are mounting up, they will lie. Even if the couple doesn't end up separating, lying and deception can make a marriage fruitless and unproductive.

Pride

Pride is a silent killer of marriage much as high blood pressure is a silent killer of the body. Pride lives subtly in marriages much like a virus enters the body and takes control. As the virus gradually kills the cells, so pride eventually destroys the marriage.

Pride comes from a feeling of one's own superiority. Such puffed-up individuals regard others with contempt as though the other person is unworthy of so much as conversing with them. Pride also results when people possess something they perceive as more or better than what others have. For example, someone with a lot of wealth will display pride when talking to

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someone who is poor. Someone with a high-paying job or senior position in a company will display pride when speaking to someone else with a lower salary or position.

This can be seen in many couples where the husband or wife or both spouses demonstrate pride. In God's eyes, marriage is between two equals. But this doesn't mean the couple processes equality in that manner. In fact, one spouse will always be better than the other in specific areas.

For example, one spouse may earn more than the other. One spouse may be better looking or more intelligent than the other. One spouse may be more talented than the other. When the one who is better in a given circumstance exhibits superiority rather than appreciating that their spouse may be better in other areas, this becomes the perfect breeding ground for pride.

Karleen was still young when she lost her parents, so she took on huge responsibilities of supporting her family. Her go-getter personality landed her in an excellent position with a big financial services company. Meanwhile, her husband Peter worked for a small local company. In consequence, Karleen earned a much higher salary than Peter. Always well-organized and planning ahead, Karleen called the shots in financial matters such as buying things for the home, savings, and investments.

"You pay the bills, groceries, and the loan you took out for our wedding," she suggested to Peter early in their marriage. "I will save my salary for our future and our children's education and marriage."

At the time, they didn't have children. One day, Peter came to Karleen with a broken mobile phone. "I need to withdraw funds to buy another mobile. Could you give me the password to our bank account?"

"Who asked you to break your mobile?" Karleen demanded angrily, not even looking in his direction. "Do you earn a

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million rupees that you break a mobile? Try getting it repaired or look for a new job that pays higher than my salary.”

This was not the first time Karleen had disparaged Peter's salary. He felt humiliated. A decade later, they remain estranged, living like roommates instead of husband and wife. Karleen has continued to climb the corporate ladder while Peter is still looking for a better job, hoping that one day he may be able to earn a good salary.

Where there is pride, the marriage cannot make progress. It will instead regress, eventually cracking and then breaking apart like a windowpane under too much stress.

Issues of the heart

The Bible calls all these common shortcomings issues of the heart (Proverbs 4:23). They are like a disease that keeps the heart unhealthy. All of these shortcomings can cause problems for any relationship, but in marriage a unique dimension comes to play. We can stop talking to a work colleague or friend if we have a conflict with them. We can stay away from a fellow church member if we have a problem with them or even change churches. In every relationship, we can choose to keep the other person at a distance.

That is, every relationship except marriage. For better or worse, you are stuck living with your spouse as long as you are married to them, so you can't escape these issues of the heart. And over time, these diseases of the heart will kill the marriage.

3. Duty Towards Our Spouse

“My husband and I are happily married,” a friend my wife hadn’t seen in years told her when they met up. “We live together like two side-by-side railway tracks. He doesn’t bother me, and I don’t interfere in his life.”

Happily married or unhappily married? Fulfilling the vows of marriage requires getting close to your spouse. It is an oxymoron to state that you are happily married but live independent lives without bothering to cross each other’s path.

While the shortcomings we just discussed are deeply-rooted issues of the heart, there are other problems equally damaging to the marriage. These may not be character flaws but still have the potential to cause a serious crack in the marriage. Such issues arise when the couple doesn’t recognize the importance of their duty towards their spouse.

Marriage always involves active interaction between spouses. Where there is no interaction, there is no life in the marriage. And if the marriage is to grow like any other living organism, a healthy understanding of this relationship and the marital duties each spouse owes to the other is important. Not

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fulfilling those duties puts stress on the marriage. Let's take a look at some of those marital duties and what happens when we neglect them.

Communication

A marriage without communication is like a car engine without oil. You may have a great make and model of car, a full gas tank, and a good driver at the wheel. But without oil, even if the car runs for a few days, weeks, or months, it will eventually grind to a squeaky stop. By then it's too late to add oil because the engine has been damaged.

Why is it that couples who communicate so much while dating or during their engagement will stop once they are married? Many couples simply underestimate the importance of communication. Either a husband or wife may be more introverted by personality and unaccustomed to sharing their thoughts and feelings while their spouse is more extroverted. That said, men especially are more likely to be brief and to the point in conversation and often don't feel anything is wrong with this.

Mark and Anna were one such couple. After their wedding, Mark became very busy with his job. Anna didn't work outside the home, and each evening she would wait eagerly for her husband to arrive home from work. By this point, Mark was always tired.

"How was your day?" Anna would ask over dinner. "What happened at work?"

"Oh, nothing much," Mark would reply. "The same old stuff."

Anna would then tell him every detail of her own day. As he listened, Mark would be surreptitiously checking his mobile. One day Anna broke off her daily narrative to say,

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“You don’t share anything about your job. Are you hiding anything?”

Mark was shocked at her accusation. He hadn’t been hiding anything. He just didn’t feel he had anything to say. He became very upset, and the couple had a bitter fight.

Communication is important in marriage and more so for the wife. Why did Mark not communicate? Obviously, he did not recognize the importance of communication. On the other hand, Anna didn’t recognize that having nothing to say about his day didn’t mean Mark was hiding anything. There were things both spouses didn’t know about each other and about what is important in marriage. The solution was simple. Mark needed to talk more and relate to his wife.

Unmet expectations

Both men and women get married with certain expectations. While neither spouse may explicitly voice their expectations, they are all there in the subconscious mind. After marriage, these expectations gradually come up in conversation and behaviour. Out of love and commitment, spouses may do their best to fulfil each other’s expectations, and the marriage blossoms.

The problem arises when one spouse can’t meet the other’s expectations. Sometimes these are unrealistic expectations only God can meet. Other expectations may be beyond a spouse’s reach or simply not one of their strengths. When needs are not met, the disappointed couple begins to think they’ve married the wrong person, or one spouse puts pressure on the other spouse to fulfil their expectations.

Once Paul and Ruby were married, Paul expected to come home from a hard day’s work to a good home-cooked meal. He’d spent his undergrad years living in a hostel where he’d

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had to eat unpalatable cafeteria food. He looked forward to enjoying his wife's cooking. Ruby also came home tired from work and expected Paul to help with household chores, including cooking.

"Ruby, why don't you cook chicken tonight?" Paul suggested one evening. "It's been a while since we've had a good meal."

Ruby was in another room busily sorting out laundry to put in the washing machine. When he didn't receive any response, Paul called out louder. "I'm asking you something. Can you hear me?"

"Yes, I can hear you," Ruby called back. "I'd appreciate a delicious meal tonight too. Why don't you use your mobile to check for chicken recipes? There are plenty of chicken recipes on the internet."

Marriage was never meant to meet all the expectations of either spouse. So where do these unrealistic expectations come from? Lack of knowledge about what to expect in marriage and about our own marital duties to our spouse is often the source. Too many couples go into marriage assuming this will fulfil all their unmet expectations. They even fantasize about such fulfilment. But they are only thinking about their own expectations without considering that their spouse has expectations as well.

Attachment to parents

The first year of marriage is always challenging with many adjustments to make. One of the biggest is leaving your parents and cleaving to your spouse as Scripture lays out in the divine pattern God gave for marriage when he created Adam and Eve.

Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother

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and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh. (Genesis 2:24, KJV)

If either spouse or both have grown up with parents to whom they have a close emotional attachment, detaching from that relationship and attaching instead to their spouse can be tough. After Justin married Lydia, he wanted to stay close to his widowed mother. She owned a two-storey house and rented out the top floor. Justin made arrangements to move into that apartment with his new wife, assuring Lydia that his mother won't interfere in their marriage. But he loved his mother and also couldn't resist the temptation to go downstairs and eat his mother's cooking instead of what his wife had prepared.

"Mom cooks such lovely food," Justin would often comment to Lydia. "Can't you spend some time with her learning to cook properly?"

"Justin, please stop comparing me with your mother," Lydia finally told him one day. "I am feeling suffocated here. I can't tolerate your demands anymore."

Justin's mother was also very critical of her new daughter-in-law. At her behest, Justin began constantly belittling and harassing Lydia. In time, this behaviour escalated to physical abuse. Two years into the marriage, Justin and Lydia filed for divorce.

While the Bible clearly instructs husbands to leave their parents and become one with their wife, many spouses remain attached primarily to their parents. They run to their parents for emotional and financial support, especially if problems arise early in marriage. This may seem harmless but has the potential to destroy the marriage. Couples make this mistake because of lack of knowledge about the importance of cleaving to their spouse. It becomes the duty of both partners to make this effort to detach from their parents and become one with their spouse.

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Misplaced priorities

Another aspect that can put strain on the marriage is misplaced priorities. Unhealthy attachment to a number of things in life can lead to misplaced priorities. Once we are married, a paradigm shift must take place in our priorities similar to when you make a commitment to follow God. Once you've made that commitment, God becomes your first priority and everything else falls behind (see Matthew 6:33; Colossians 3:1-4).

Outside of our commitment to God, marriage is the most important priority that should bring such a change. Prior to marriage, we may have any number of priorities towards which we feel a strong attachment. In chapter two, for instance, Jonathan's strong attachment to his friends led to prioritising time with them over spending time with his wife. Someone else may be unduly attached to a specific sport, favourite team, or athlete. Or their love for their chosen career leads to an undue attachment to their job. Watching sports, having a favourite team, or loving your job are not problems in themselves but can become problems if we are so obsessed with these attachments that our marriage takes a lower priority.

Marriage is hard work, and we must each pour ourselves into it to get the best out of it. Unless it becomes a priority over every other thing in life, including other relationships like our parents or even our own children, marriage cannot be fully enjoyed nor become a fulfilled relationship.

Misunderstanding of needs

While men and women are equal in God's sight, God has wired them differently. They think differently, behave differently, and feel differently. While some of their needs are the same, others are different. Among the various needs of a man,

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respect and sexual intimacy are at the top. In contrast, a woman's top needs are emotional intimacy and communication. Many women misunderstand their husband's need for sexual intimacy with misplaced priorities.

Rachel often complained to her friends and prayer partners that her husband Mike wanted constant sex from her. She considered this to be a spiritual problem and would pray for him. One day as Rachel entered their bedroom, she was stunned to see what he was viewing on his laptop. "You are watching porn! How dare you defile this sacred room. You have a major spiritual problem."

"Well, you don't want to satisfy my needs so where else should I go?" Mike responded angrily. "Have I committed adultery?"

If Rachel had recognized that sexual intimacy was one of her husband's primary needs, she would have satisfied it, and they would have developed a fruitful, blessed marriage. Instead, their marriage failed even though both spouses were committed Christians and attended church. The problem was lack of knowledge about the duties of marriage and the differing needs of their spouse.

Underestimated Spiritual forces

Over the last two chapters, we've discussed common shortcomings and lack of knowledge about marital duties and about our spouse, both of which can have devastating effects on a marriage. Are these the only issues that can tear apart a marriage? Or is there something else that can seriously harm a marriage and render it unproductive?

Absolutely! In fact, there is one other issue even Christian couples often overlook and underestimate. Tony and Clara had been married for just a month. Both were godly young people

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who loved each other and loved God. They'd participated in pre-marital counselling so knew a lot about marriage and their duty to each other. Both of them had prayed much about who to marry and were confident it was God's will that they'd found each other.

Then one night in bed, Tony and Clara got into an argument about a beautiful young girl from the church. Clara wasn't happy that Tony had been talking to this girl after the Sunday morning service. Tony tried to reassure his wife. "We were just discussing the upcoming church retreat. You are the only one I love!"

Clara wasn't convinced, and the argument turned into a bitter fight. Getting out of bed, Tony left the room, slamming the door behind him. He went to sleep in another room while Clara lay crying in their bedroom, hoping Tony would come back and patch things up.

But Tony was so hurt and emotional at his wife's accusations he wasn't sure he wanted to reconcile. He felt disrespected. He began doubting Clara's maturity and wondered how he could spend the rest of his life with her if she could suspect him so easily. He even questioned, "Did I marry the right person?"

How can a trivial argument bring these kinds of thoughts to someone? How can a happy marriage suddenly seem to go wrong? The Bible instructs us:

In your anger do not sin: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold. (Ephesians 4:26-27, NIV).

What this tells us is that the devil can get a foothold in our lives and marriage, especially when there is anger and no reconciliation. According to the Cambridge dictionary, the word

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“foothold” means “a strong first position from which further progress can be made.”

In his epistle to the Ephesian church, the apostle Paul speaks of a spiritual realm where the devil and his forces operate.

For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. (Ephesians 6:12, NIV)

Together, these two Bible passages make clear that there is a spiritual side to challenges in marriage that demands immediate attention. Many marriages seem to be going fine, but one day we suddenly hear that the couple has separated. What could have happened? The spiritual dimension is often ignored, and families pay a heavy price. Ignorance and carelessness can lead to irreparable damage to a happy family.

Issues of the heart, failing to fulfil marital duties, and the unseen spiritual forces of darkness are three patterns common to marriages that are breaking up. This is important to understand because the solution to these fracturing marriages is simply to resolve these three patterns. In the next section of this book, we will go through a number of solutions for the problems we've just discussed.

Mark and Sharon

“Okay, I can now understand the pattern,” Sharon commented when Mark had finished telling her about what he'd learned in his reading. “So there are really three things we need to be careful about. Let me see if I recall them all. First,

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issues of the heart. Second, lack of knowledge about our marital duties. And third—what was the third one?”

“Underestimating spiritual forces of darkness,” Mark finished for her.

“Oh, yes, that’s the tricky one,” Sharon agreed. “And now that we know the pattern, the solution should be simple.”

“Right again,” Mark replied. “You are always right.”

They both laughed. Then Mark continued, “There is a solution for all of these problems.”

Sharon couldn’t wait to hear it. “Tell me quickly what it is!”

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Questions For Discussion

1. Do you see any issues of the heart we've discussed above that might be affecting your marriage? If so, make a list of those that apply. If you are reading this book as a couple, each spouse should make their own list.
2. Do you experience conflicts in your marriage due to lack of understanding about marriage and marital duties? If so, specify those conflicts and what area of lack of knowledge may have instigated each conflict.
3. Are there differences in upbringing, personality, habits of spending, communication, or other areas that cause conflict with your spouse? If so, make a list of those differences. If you are reading this book as a couple, each spouse should make their own list.
4. Do you remember any occasion when you got into arguments or major fights with your spouse because of a trivial reason? Do you think this could have been a spiritual attack? Write down the occasion. If more than one, make a list.

Section Two:

DISCOVERING THE SOLUTION

This section will cover the three pillars that provide the firewall in your marriage. These three pillars will offer solutions for the problems discussed in the last section. After going through the following three chapters, you will have all the practical tools you require to safeguard your marriage.

4. Intimacy With God

I was so excited when I first touched our new family vehicle, a white hatchback Hyundai Santro Zing, in the auto dealership showroom. As I looked forward eagerly to driving it away from the dealership, the salesman reminded me, “Please send your car for regular service. And be sure to get it done only from an authorised service centre.”

In other words, he was telling me to get my car serviced regularly and only by the actual manufacturer of my car. If I took it to an unauthorised service, that could void the car’s warranty. When you buy a car, it’s important to stay in touch with the manufacturer if you want to ensure a happy, long, enjoyable drive for many years.

The same cannot be truer for the institution of marriage, whose maker and designer is God. If we want a strong, fruitful, successful marriage, we must stay closely in touch with God. Which brings us to our first pillar in our firewall for the protection of our marriage.

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Pillar one – Intimacy with God

Intimacy with God is the first pillar for building the firewall in your marriage. Your marriage will grow stronger as you grow in your intimacy with God and become weaker when you stay away from him. This begins with a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. When you put your faith in Jesus as your Lord and personal Saviour, your new life begins.

What does putting your faith in Jesus mean? It means you believe that Jesus loves you so much that he took the penalty of your sins on the cross and shed his precious blood for you. You believe in your heart that he rose from the dead, guaranteeing you eternal life with God (see John 3:16; Acts 16:31; Romans 10:9-10). This is followed by complete surrender of your life to Jesus. You hand over the keys of your heart to him.

Once you have done this, you start your relationship with God. Has this happened in your life? If this has indeed happened in your life, you can become intimate with God.

Relationship with God and the impact on life

Not just marriage but for anything in life to be successful, our intimacy with God is of prime importance. This includes our careers, ministry, projects, and finances. However smooth or rough the journey, whatever it may cost you, success from eternity's perspective is guaranteed if you have the Lord Jesus as number one in your life. What else can be the outcome when you are walking close with the Lord? The first psalm expresses this so practically.

Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers, but whose delight is in the law of the Lord, and who meditates on his law day and night.

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That person is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither — whatever they do prospers. (Psalm 1, NIV)

What does growing in intimacy with God actually mean? Does it mean knowing the doctrines of the Christian faith? Reading and studying your Bible daily? Memorising scripture verses or knowing the Bible from cover to cover?

All of these are certainly part of growing in the knowledge of the Bible, and each has its place in the Christian's life. But there is more to it. We don't read the Bible daily and seek to understand it just to become theologians, preachers, and teachers, though that may be God's calling for some of you. We read the Bible and seek to understand it so that our lives will be transformed.

Read the Sermon on the Mount, for example (Matthew 5-7). Why is Jesus preaching about the kingdom of God? So that our character is shaped and so that our standards of morality reach a higher level.

How do we know if we are growing in intimacy with God? Just ask yourself if knowing God personally has had a profound impact on your life, including your thinking, speaking, and conduct. In other words, are you growing in Christ's likeness? Is your character becoming more godly? Are you demonstrating the fruit of the Spirit—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23, NKJV)—in your life?

In his second epistle, the apostle Peter writes about how God's power is able to transform us in order that we may live a godly life.

By his divine power, God has given us everything we

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need for living a godly life. We have received all of this by coming to know him, the one who called us to himself by means of his marvellous glory and excellence. (2 Peter 1:3, NLT)

Those who enjoy spending time with their Lord and Saviour and are hungry and thirsty for his word will grow ever closer to the Lord. The time they spend with their Creator is a life-transforming experience that will develop in them an increasingly Christ-like character. After all, what is the point of knowing the Bible cover to cover if that doesn't translate into strong, godly character?

How can you ensure that you have a dynamic relationship with God and are growing in your intimacy with God? It depends on how much time you invest in this intimacy. As my own three decades of experience in the investing world has taught me, regular, consistent, persistent investing over a long period of time yields much. Markets go up and down, but those who don't give up over the long period gain. Arguably, our intimacy with God is far more important and rewarding than money or anything else.

Intimacy with God and marriage

Are you wondering what growing in intimacy with God has to do with marriage? Maybe you are asking right now, "Can't I still carry on my marriage regardless of my intimacy with God?"

Yes, you can as many couples do. But your marriage will never reach the full potential of a fulfilled marriage unless God is part of your marriage. Let me share with you why intimacy with God matters.

Intimacy With God

Commitment to marriage

Those who are committed to God in life are also committed to their marriages no matter what. Separation or divorce is never something that crosses their mind. Even if it does, such a thought is temporary, something that may cross their minds during an emotional moment. They believe that what God has joined, man should not separate (Matthew 19:6). They may not instantly achieve a fulfilled marriage as God works over time in their life or their spouse's, but the sacredness of marriage never diminishes in their minds.

Henry was a full-time worker for a Christian social organisation when he married Amy. Little did Amy know Henry's job would take him so frequently to other cities that she would only see him a few days each month. Disappointed with Henry's schedule, Amy asked him, "Could you make some adjustments to your work schedule so we can spend more time together?"

"I'm committed to God's work," Henry responded. "I'm sorry but you'll just have to adjust."

This went on for years, which deeply hurt Amy. But she was committed to the marriage and hoped one day this would change. Instead of speaking angrily to Henry about the situation, she took her concerns silently to God in prayer and continued reading her Bible daily. Though Henry was too busy to dedicate much time to Amy, he was committed to their marriage as well, showing his love for her whenever he got the opportunity.

God heard Amy's prayers, and eventually things began changing. Henry found a new job with another organisation, providing him more time for his family. Amy and Henry have now been married for thirty-five years, and the early years of struggle are behind them. Because both were committed to marriage as an institution established by God, they stayed

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together despite difficult times and today are very happily married.

Commitment to God and the institution of marriage is a by-product of our intimacy with God. A growing relationship with God honours marriage because marriage is God's design and ownership of marriage belongs to him. Those who give up on their marriages are in one sense giving up on their allegiance to God and are telling him, "Lord, you are no longer important to me. I will live my own life."

Those who don't give up on their marriage no matter what happens are telling God, "It's tough, Lord! I don't understand! But I trust you, and I want to honour you by staying put in my marriage."

Victory over temptations

Sam works in a swanky professional office where there are well-dressed and perfumed attractive women. These women in outward appearance are certainly more beautiful and attractive than his wife, who is never that well-dressed or perfumed at home. Are these office colleagues a temptation to Sam? They certainly are if he is a normal healthy man, sound in body and mind. But that is not a sin unless Sam entertains lustful thoughts such as Jesus spoke of in his Sermon on the Mount.

But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. (Matthew 5:28, NIV)

What kind of man do you think will withstand such strong temptation, one who is growing in intimacy with God or one who is casual about his commitment to God? The man who loves his Lord and spends time in God's presence flees from the temptation just as Joseph did as recorded in the Bible in the Old Testament when faced with temptation from Potiphar's

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wife (Genesis 39). In contrast, the same temptation will entice the weak man who has only a casual relationship with God.

Early in his career even before he was married, Sam decided to be careful with how he looked at women in his office or interacted with them, especially those who could be a strong source of temptation. Daily reading and meditating on the Bible helped him.

After he married his wife Jerusha, Sam assured her, “I am careful with my eyes and won’t chat with women if we are alone together.”

Jerusha loved God too and was strong in her faith, spending regular time in prayer and reading the Bible. One day she received a comment of appreciation from a married man in their church on a photo she’d posted to Facebook. “You look good in this outfit.”

She took the man’s response at first as just a friendly comment that made her feel good about her appearance. Then she suddenly realised these affectionate words from a married man could be a temptation from the enemy.

Sexual temptations are potentially the biggest threat to marriages today. One need not commit physical adultery to engage in mental or emotional adultery. And once that line is crossed, it is just a matter of opportunity and how weak you are as a person before mental or emotional adultery translates to actual adultery.

Temptations and trials never come in the same shape or size. They take different forms each time, always tricking us. If we yield to them, they will only become stronger the next time. One of the primary protections against this trap of the evil one is a strong and growing relationship with God. Then no matter how big the temptation, we will be able to resist successfully.

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Serving one another

Sexual temptations aren't the only temptations we face in our marriages where a growing intimacy with God will help us find victory. Serving one other in marriage is essential if the marriage is to become a truly intimate relationship. If both spouses do not serve, the marriage will sooner rather than later end up in a relationship that is anything but marriage. If only one spouse keeps giving and serving, the relationship may survive, but emotional bonding will never happen.

Jesus makes clear in Scripture that we are to serve each other just as he came to serve others and give his life for us.

Jesus called them [the disciples] together and said, "You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."
(Mark 10: 42-45, NIV)

But for both spouses to serve each other consistently is not easy. Subconsciously or not, we enter into marriage expecting to receive. After all, we weren't born saints but are only in the process (Philippians 1:6). Some people are way ahead of others in the journey of becoming saints. More often than not, we are quite immature at the time we get married. We are by our sinful natures programmed to serve only out of ulterior motives or when it becomes a duty.

Unless the couple grows closer to God and grows in godliness, serving will not come naturally and out of love. It takes divine help to serve others as Jesus served, and this divine help

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comes as we become increasingly intimate with God. As we read God's Word and apply it to our lives, giving will become a natural lifestyle for our marriage.

Tim was extremely busy in Christian ministry right from the early years of marriage. His young bride Diana resigned herself to the reality that she was the giver and would be doing the serving in their marriage. While she never complained to Tim, she cried out in prayer to God, "Lord, please help! I am weak. I can't handle this alone."

A few years later, Tim realised how unfair he was being to his loving wife, who continued to support him in ministry, care for their children, cook meals, and do the household chores without expecting much from Tim. During these years, Diana continued reading and studying her Bible and spending time with God in prayer. God heard her prayers, and Tim changed.

"If I was not intimate with the Lord, our marriage would have broken long ago," Diana shares now.

What Diana did in continuing to serve her husband in love was not natural but required divine help. If she'd given up or decided she'd served long enough, their marriage would not have endured. Diana's intimacy with God brought a big difference in their married life.

Transparency

Lies and deception are natural to human beings, but they are a slow poison in marriage. A marriage is built on trust. The moment this trust is broken, the whole structure crashes down. Though trust can be rebuilt, it will take time to rebuild. The best marriages are those where there is transparency. Both spouses know each other and keep every aspect of their lives open to each other.

Grace was anxious about her marriage with Justin. Justin

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was handsome and spoke well publicly. Many in the church would talk with Justin, including young girls. Early in their marriage, Grace shared with Justin what made her feel anxious.

“Please don’t break my trust,” she told him.

Justin was initially annoyed but later came to understand Grace’s anxieties and how her childhood had made it difficult for her to trust men. One day he made a commitment to her before God in order to build Grace’s trust. “I will share with you all the details if I ever have business meetings with any woman in a closed room or travel alone in a car with any woman on work. Nor will I talk to them about personal matters, only work.”

Justin also shared his personal email password and gave Grace access to his text messages. He made a commitment as well that he wouldn’t watch any movies or TV with questionable content when he stayed overnight in a hotel during business trips.

After this conversation, Grace became more relaxed and confident about their relationship because she knew Justin was being transparent and honest with her. She never checked his text messages or email, but his willingness to allow her to do so reassured her. Justin valued his marriage and wanted to please God and his wife. He also wanted to be accountable so he wouldn’t stumble and fall into sin. He knew that making these commitments would build his marriage long term. Justin and Grace have now completed more than two decades of marriage built with solid trust.

Those who believe in God do not shy away from transparency. There are no two compartments in a marriage, one where you keep secrets and the other that is public. Both spouses should keep their lives open to each other, and this can only be done successfully with God’s divine help.

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Forgiveness

That said, since we are all saints in process, we will make mistakes, which is why forgiveness is so fundamental to our Christian faith. Some of the biggest, deepest wounds we suffer are caused by loved ones, especially spouses. We must learn to practice forgiveness actively on a daily basis, not allowing hurt feelings and anger to be carried forward from one day to the next, as the apostle Paul instructs in his epistle to the Ephesians.

In your anger do not sin. Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold . . . Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.
(Ephesians 4:26-27, 32)

When the disciples asked Jesus if they should keep forgiving someone who sinned against them even up to seven times, the response of Jesus was to forgive up to seventy times seven (Matthew 18:21-22). In other words, not to put a limit on forgiving. In fact, Scripture teaches that if we want our heavenly Father to forgive us, we need to forgive others (Matthew 6:14-15; Ephesians 4:32).

This too requires spiritual maturity, which comes only from growing in intimacy with God. When teaching on forgiveness in marriage, I always use the following analogy that has had a profound effect on my wife and me. Each time you are hurt by someone and refuse to forgive, it's like refusing to flush the toilet. What happens when you don't flush after each use? The toilet begins to stink like a neglected, uncleaned public toilet.

Just imagine two people with that kind of stench living together in the same house. It's toxic individually and for the marriage. As we grow closer to God, we recognize our own

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sinful past and how God's forgiveness has restored us. As we understand forgiveness, we are able to forgive our spouse.

Mike and Ella loved each other and were committed to their marriage as well as the son and daughter they had together. Then one day Mike told Ella, "I've decided to separate from you. I am planning to marry Samantha."

Shocked and devastated, Ella took her deep pain to God in prayer, surrendering Mike and their broken marriage to God. Her church and friends supported her with much prayer and counselling. After several months, Mike came back to his senses and returned home like the prodigal son in the parable Jesus told (Luke 15:11-32). Ella was happy that Mike was back home but found it hard to forgive him and rebuild their marriage. By God's grace, she did forgive him. Gradually, they talked, and Mike truly repented.

Today, Mike and Ella are back to doing ministry together. Ella knows it is God who helped her to forgive Mike. "The Bible taught me how forgiven I was and that the forgiveness Christ gave me on the cross was far bigger than Mike's sin."

In his book *Total Forgiveness*, American Christian author and ministry leader R. T. Kendall shares some profound insights on what is forgiveness and what is not. Many of the elements he lists are especially relevant in a marriage relationship.

First, Kendall lists the following elements as describing true forgiveness.

- Being aware of what someone has done and still forgiving them.
- Choosing to keep no records of wrong (1 Corinthians 13:5).
- Refusing to punish.

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- Being merciful – blessed are the merciful (Matthew 5:7).
- The absence of bitterness.

Kendall also outlines what forgiveness is *not*. Forgiveness does not mean:

- Approval of what they did.
- Excusing what they did.
- Justifying what they did.
- Denying what they did.
- Pretending we are not hurt.

Many times in marriage, we need supernatural strength to love the unlovable and forgive the unforgivable act. It's impossible to do it on our own. How true are the following words Alexander Pope wrote in his poem *An Essay on Criticism*: "To err is human, to forgive divine.

5. Bear Much Fruit

We've spoken about the importance of intimacy with God in developing a strong marriage, including the role of spending time in prayer and God's Word to help us grow in that relationship with God. As we grow, we will develop godly characteristics that are also vital for building a healthy relationship. The Bible refers to these characteristics as the fruit of the Spirit.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. (Galatians 5:22-23a, NIV)

The fruit of the Spirit is not something we can produce through our own hard work. Great results may be a natural outcome of hard work. But the fruit of the Spirit is a supernatural outcome of an intimate relationship with God and comes only as we allow the Holy Spirit to work in our lives.

Depending on our natural temperament, we all possess certain strengths as well as certain weaknesses that prevent us from relating harmoniously with others, especially with our

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spouse. Our basic temperament won't change since God created each of us with a particular temperament (see chapter seven for discussion on temperaments). But our weaknesses can become strengths as we allow the Holy Spirit to produce spiritual fruit in our lives. Let's look at a few of these fruits of the Holy Spirit and how they apply to our marriages.

Patience

I am by nature melancholic and a perfectionist while my wife is more sanguine and practical. My perfectionism caused much hurt to my wife in our early years of marriage. But she bore with me patiently and continued to show love. Her strength of character gave me the space to become less perfectionist, though I will always have those tendencies.

Having to bear with each other in love is not an exception in marriage but rather a rule. A husband and wife must show lot of patience, or forbearance, another name for patience, especially early in marriage when all the opposition forces come to play, including different temperaments, cultures, and upbringings. We must be willing to overlook each other's faults and allow each other to grow out of our weakness if we are to develop a strong unity as a couple. This requires more than human love and patience as the apostle Paul wrote to the church at Ephesus.

Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. (Ephesians 4:2-3, NIV)

Notice that patience and bearing with one another in love are what lead to unity, whether in the church or in the family.

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All the weaknesses of our individual temperaments that before marriage are overlooked as minor faults will become a cause of major discord after marriage. As we grow closer to God, he moulds and shapes us, smoothing out those sharp edges of our lives that can hurt the marriage. While this is happening, we must bear patiently with one another.

Gentleness

James and his younger brother grew up with his aunt and her two boys. In his school days, James had an obsession with winning fights with other classmates. As he grew older, he got into constant arguments, often for no reason. The oldest boy in the home, he was always bossy toward his younger brother and cousins.

In his late teens, James put his faith in Jesus as his Lord and Saviour. One notable change in his life was that he argued much less and became a peace-maker. In his late twenties, he married Anna, who had grown up very differently with one older sister. One day she overheard James speaking quite harshly to his brother over the phone.

“Why do you talk to your brother so rudely?” she asked James.

James was surprised at her question. “Rudely? No, that is just how we talk. He doesn’t mind.”

“Well, just don’t talk to me like that!” Anna told him in no uncertain terms. “Please be more gentle.”

James realised that his past wasn’t completely behind him and that he needed to be more careful in how he spoke if he was to show his wife that he loved her.

Aristotle defined gentleness, or meekness, as the balance between excessive anger and excessive lack of anger. It is the quality of a person whose emotions are under perfect control.

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Gentleness does not imply weakness. On the contrary, it is evidence of great power under control. An excellent example of gentleness, or meekness, is a horse that is completely tamed and listens to the master. It has great “horsepower,” but that power is under the master’s control.

New Testament apostles like Paul and Peter often mention gentleness and humility as important virtues for maintaining unity within the church. Your family is the smallest church on earth. The virtue of gentleness can preserve family unity and save many a marriage from destruction.

Those who are gentle won’t respond thoughtlessly in conversation even if they are right. A gentle response shows that you respect the other person. This builds confidence and gives an opportunity to discuss and reason out any matters of conflict. In contrast, losing control over our emotions results in deeply painful behaviour towards our loved ones who deserve better treatment for all that they mean and do for us.

Gentleness, or meekness, is indeed a divine spiritual fruit that the Lord Jesus himself demonstrated while on earth.

Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I [Jesus] am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. (Matthew 11:29, NIV)

In his well-known Sermon on the Mount, Jesus promised blessings on those with a gentle, or meek, spirit.

Blessed are the meek for they will inherit the earth. (Matthew 5:5, NIV)

As you and your spouse spend time with the Creator, you will both grow in gentleness, and your marriage will be bound with a unique bond.

Humility

Humility is a virtue that will help maintain the unity of the marriage like no other because so many other virtues are unleashed by this one virtue. Forgiveness, for example. A humble person can forgive easily while a proud person finds it hard. Other fruits of the Spirit listed above (Galatians 5:22-23a) like kindness, love, patience, and self-control are commonly practiced by humble people.

Humility is one virtue God's people should be the first to practice, yet it's a virtue we struggle to produce. A wretched, hopeless, hell-bound sinner forgiven by God receives a permanent place in God's eternal, glorious kingdom by sheer grace. There is nothing we have to do to earn this place, literally! What more do we need to stay humble?

"Honey, I appreciate your honesty and humility," Kari told her husband Joseph. "Even after forty years of our marriage, you haven't changed, and I love you."

Kari and Joseph came from very different backgrounds. Kari grew up in a non-Christian home outside India while Joseph grew up in a Christian home in southern India. Kari came to faith in Jesus Christ while studying in a western nation. The couple have settled in India, where they run an orphanage for under-privileged children whom they both love as their own. Though they grew up speaking different languages in different countries from very different cultures, their married life is exemplary. They are united in purpose and calling.

Joseph and Kari have helped countless young couples in their marriages, many on the verge of separation. All this was impossible without humility. Differences can be converted into unity only through humility.

During a conflict between husband and wife, usually the

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more humble of the two takes the lead in asking forgiveness and resolves the conflict. A conflict where one spouse or both set out to win the argument only fuels pride and damages the marriage. A humble Christian will never strive to win the argument but to win the marriage.

How many broken Christian marriages could have been saved if humility had dominated the conversation. Instead, pride subtly rules in our homes, and too often we don't even realise. Pride is like a tiny leak in a cooking gas pipe. If not recognized and fixed in time, the deadly gas will gradually leak out until one day it blows up and destroys the home.

The apostle Paul could find no better example for perfect humility than Jesus Christ himself who though God was willing to become nothing for us.

Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing . . . And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross! (Philippians 2:6-8).

Jesus died on the cross because he humbled himself, and he did that because of his love for us. In the original Greek in which the New Testament was written, there are different words for love. *Phileo* is human brotherly love. *Eros* is romantic love between a husband and wife. *Agape* is the highest level of love, God's own divine love that can come only through intimacy with him. Those who love their spouses with agape love are willing to be humble.

Agape love

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The best example of agape love is, of course, the Lord Jesus himself, who gave his life as a ransom for all of us on the cross (Mark 10:45; Philippians 2:8). He didn't feel like dying on the cross. It was a choice he made out of his love for us. What did he get in return? Nothing! We can give Jesus nothing except our allegiance.

Is agape love possible humanly speaking? Our second daughter was born prematurely. We almost lost her, and over the days to come, my wife also went through some health challenges. She battled lack of sleep, post-surgery inconvenience, high blood pressure, and post-partum depression. But in all these challenges, she focused on doing everything she could to care for our baby and bring our baby up to a healthy weight. This was an example of agape love I witnessed right before my eyes. What did she get in return? Nothing! The baby gave nothing in return. On the contrary, she simply demanded more milk.

My wife is not unique. All mothers will do this for their babies. But in marriage there is a different dynamic. The mother who shows agape love to her baby may not be able to show agape love to her husband.

"How can I love this person?" she may ask. "He doesn't deserve it!"

That is exactly the point. When you love someone who doesn't deserve it, that is agape love. Agape love is not a feeling but a choice one makes. To love your spouse with agape love is impossible without divine help from God. And unless we truly understand what God's agape love is, we can't give that agape love to others. The apostle Paul gives us a definition of agape love in his first epistle to the church at Corinth.

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

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not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. (1 Corinthians 13:4-7)

Hindrances to growing in intimacy with God

We've discussed a number of the fruits of the Spirit that will strengthen our marriages as God divinely helps us put them into practice in our lives. But God's divine help only comes through an intimate relationship with God. Have you ever wondered why do seemingly good Christian men and women repeatedly do certain things that don't reflect their stature as believers?

The reality is that not everyone who places their faith in Jesus Christ, reads their Bible, and goes to church become spiritually mature at the same pace. And there are typically one or two major issues in each person's life that we struggle to overcome, sometimes for years, other times most of our life, before we obtain victory. These issues also surface in the marriage and are responsible for many conflicts and unresolved problems between couples.

Emotional baggage and mental illness are two broad categories that can affect your spiritual growth if not addressed. They need to be handled with care and much prayer. Professional help like counselling, therapy, and medicines may be required in some cases for healing.

A word for those seeking to be married

If you are reading this and are not yet married but on the lookout for a suitable life partner, keep in mind that intimacy

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with God is not just for after you are married. It should begin before you ever start looking for a spouse. Before seeking to find the right person, you should seek to be that right person. After all, what if you find just the right person but you happen to be the wrong person for them?

By wrong person, I mean that you have issues of the heart, whether emotional or spiritual. If you want a healthy marriage, you must be healthy first or your marriage will struggle. This begins with an intimate relationship with Jesus Christ. Until you are strong in your spiritual foundation, you shouldn't think of getting married. If you struggle with lust, anger, perfectionism, low self-esteem, feelings of loneliness, or other issues, ask God to help you overcome these so that they won't affect your marriage.

More often than not, issues before marriage don't vanish after marriage. On the contrary, they become bigger issues in marriage and trouble the couple for many years if not addressed. If you suffer with loneliness when not married, this won't go away just by being married. Several studies have shown that a significant percentage of married people are lonely. Likewise other issues of the heart that should be addressed before you are married.

Your relationship with Jesus is the most important decision you will ever make, so if you want success in your marriage, get this right first. Accept the Lord Jesus as your personal Saviour and invite him into your life. Trust him for your present life and eternity. Once you've done so, you will carry the blessings of this vital decision into your other areas of life, including marriage. Later in the book, I will share real life stories of married couples who neglected this area of their life and the price they had to pay.

As mentioned, there may be other issues like harmful emotional baggage or mental health problems for which coun-

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selling and therapy may be needed. But counselling and therapy have their limitations. Without a sincere commitment to God, you won't get too far. Which is why it is so important to put into practice this first pillar for building the firewall of your marriage—intimacy with God.

Mark and Sharon

Sharon didn't move an inch after hearing this. She kept looking at Mark without a single blink of her eyes. Mark finally waved his hands in front of her face. "Hey, Sharon, where are you?"

"I just never knew intimacy with God is such an important pillar for our marriage," Sharon said in a low voice. After a long, silent pause, she added almost in a whisper, "I think I'm responsible for some of problems we went through early in marriage."

"Not just you!" Mark said firmly. "We were both responsible. Remember my unresolved anger for which you prayed all those years?"

"And you prayed for my insecurities for so many years," Sharon responded softly. "Thank you, Mark."

Closing her eyes, Sharon prayed with deep heart feeling, "Lord Jesus, thank you for helping me and Mark in our weaknesses so our marriage could grow into a beautiful relationship. Help us to continue staying close to you so that we may grow stronger and never bring any harm to our marriage. This marriage is your gift, and we want to take good care of it. In Jesus's name, I pray. Amen!"

When she'd finished praying and opened her eyes, Mark said teasingly, "You do know that growing intimacy with God isn't enough to protect our marriage."

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“It isn’t?” Sharon demanded. “What do you mean? I thought you said it would.”

“Yes, but there are also two more pillars that are crucial for our marriage,” Mark informed her tenderly.

“So what are they?” Taking Mark’s hand, Sharon looked into his eyes with love and anticipation. “Tell me. I’m waiting.”

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Questions For Discussion

1. Which of the qualities and fruit of the Spirit mentioned in the last two chapters would you consider your strengths? List all qualities that apply and rate yourself for each one on a scale of one to ten (one being weak and ten being strong).
2. Which of the above-mentioned qualities and fruit of the Spirit would you consider your weaknesses? Again, list all qualities that apply and rate yourself on each one on a scale of one to ten (one being weak and ten being strong).
3. Discuss what difference the strong qualities have made to your marriage.
4. Discuss what difference it will make to your marriage if you work on your weak areas.

6. Intimacy With Your Spouse

One plus one equals one! That may be bad math, but it works in marriage because marriage is a union of two unique individuals. The marriage is a success when that union has progressed into those two unique individuals becoming one as the Bible describes when God first created marriage.

*Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother
and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one
flesh. (Genesis 2:24, NKJV)*

Regardless of how much a husband and/or wife loves God and is growing in intimacy with God, if the two of them don't fuse together into one, the marriage is a failure no matter how much we polish and shine it with our own spirituality. Becoming one is fundamental to marriage. Which is why intimacy with our spouse is a vital second pillar of a strong, healthy marriage.

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Pillar two – Intimacy with spouse

Daniel was a Christian who loved God with all his heart. He never missed church service on Sundays, attended Bible studies, and gave his tithe regularly to the church. He was also active in ministry and never missed opportunities to be involved in community service. He spent a lot of time reading the Bible and other Christian books to gain more knowledge of God's kingdom and correct theological doctrines.

Daniel married Mary, who also loved God and was very committed to serving in God's kingdom. She had always prayed for a godly husband who followed the Lord and wanted to serve God. When they got married, it seemed like a dream marriage. Both had good jobs and looked forward to great careers. They both attended Sunday church services regularly.

Not long after their honeymoon, they started getting busy in their jobs. Mary was an extrovert and wanted to go out on weekends to restaurants or to visit friends after a hectic week. Daniel was an introvert who enjoyed slipping into the study room at every opportunity to read his favourite books.

One day, Mary told Daniel, "Can you stop reading your books and take time to read your wife too? It feels as though I'm a servant in this house who takes care of your food, cleaning, children, and sexual needs. Beyond that, I have no value. When did you last take me out for dinner? Let alone on a vacation? Are we married or just roommates?"

So what does becoming one involve? A lot! If becoming one were a seamless affair requiring little or no effort from the couple, God would not have repeated the command that "the two shall become one flesh" five times in the Bible (Genesis 2:24; Matthew 19:5; Mark 10:8; 1 Corinthians 6:16; Ephesians 5:31).

If you've read books, watched videos, or listened to podcasts from well-known Christian authors and speakers who

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are experts on marriage and family, you have likely come across a number of key topics concerning marriage. Among my favourites are Dr James and Shirley Dobson, who founded Focus on the Family and Family Talk, Tim and Beverly La Haye, Dennis and Barbara Rainey, Jimmy and Karen Evans, as well as Focus on the Family radio hosts Jim Daly and John Fuller.

I will share a few of these topics and give a brief summary. The intent is not to provide an in-depth discussion of each topic but to share enough for you to understand the basic gist, leaving you to probe further into these topics if you aren't already familiar with them. A search on the internet will give sources for books, radio, and TV programs.

Leaving Parents and Cleaving to Spouse

In his book *Intimate Allies*, psychologist Dan Allender states that "the failure to shift loyalty from parents to spouse is a central issue in almost all marital conflict." He traces up to ninety percent of marital discord he has dealt with back to a failure to leave parents and become "one flesh" as a couple.

God in his infinite wisdom understood the serious consequences of such failure, a reason it is mentioned five times throughout both the Old and New Testament (see above). That God first gave this command to Adam and Eve, who didn't even have parents, only underscores the importance of this teaching for generations to come after them.

That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh. (Genesis 2:24)

Depending on the culture, different interpretations have

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been given to this verse. In India, for example, where extended families often live in the same household, a common interpretation is that God wasn't speaking of physical leaving but emotional. So what does this passage really mean? Is it only an emotional leaving or is it physical too?

In truth, it should be both physical and emotional. Physical separation is a crucial first step because that's a big decision in many cultures. Both male and female spouses who grew up depending on their parents for basic physical and emotional needs must break that tie by living separately from their parents. This may be emotionally stressful for both the parents and the couple, but it is nevertheless necessary.

With lots of opportunities to connect over email, phone, or WhatsApp, emotional separation can still be a challenge despite physical separation. Both husband and wife can keep depending on their parents for instructions, guidance, and help. Emotional separation from parents is equally important so that the marriage blossoms and thrives. In fact, physical separation provides that unique opportunity to be emotionally independent. But we must make a conscious effort for this to become a reality. There are couples who often run to their parents to solve their marital issues. This is emotional dependence and has adverse consequences for the family unit.

Many couples misunderstand leaving and cleaving as somehow dishonouring their parents. God never intended that, or he'd never have included honouring our parents as one of the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:12; Ephesians 6:1). But honouring our parents doesn't mean we have to be emotionally dependent on them and hurt our spouse in the process.

Mohan grew up in an affluent Indian family and lived in a big house with many rooms in a major city. When he married Riya, Mohan's parents wanted the young couple to move in with them. But even before their marriage, Mohan and Riya

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had decided that they would live separately. Though this meant paying rent in a very expensive city, they knew their marriage would be blessed by this decision.

“Although it cost us financially, this was one of the best decisions we took in our marriage,” Mohan shares now after thirty-five years of marriage. Mohan and Riya remain happily married and help other young couples in their marriages.

Love and Respect

Several times in the Bible, God commands a husband to love his wife. In fact, the apostle Paul’s epistle to the Ephesian church gives this command three times in just one chapter.

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church ... In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself ... However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband. (Ephesians 5:25, 28, 33, NIV)

Paul also writes the same in his letter to the church of Colossae.

Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them. (Colossians 3:19, NIV)

But it is notable that not once does the apostle Paul instruct wives to love their husbands. On the contrary, the instruction to the wife is that she “respect her husband” (Ephesians 5:33b, NIV). This is because a woman’s strength in the marriage relationship is her capacity to love her husband regardless of what he may be like and how he treats her. Love is also a woman’s

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biggest need. Husbands need to be reminded often to love their wives while the wife loves naturally.

In contrast, what men seek in their workplace, ministry, church, but above all in their home is respect. If a man doesn't receive respect in the home, especially from their wife, any respect they receive from other spheres of life and work lacks potency to strengthen their marriage in comparison. If a man doesn't receive respect elsewhere, but his wife treats him with respect, that is far more fulfilling for the man than if he received full respect from outside sources but none within the home. No wonder the apostle Paul under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit wrote these different commands to husbands and wives.

In his book *Love and Respect*, Dr Emerson Eggerichs shares about this crazy cycle, writing of married couples that “without love she reacts without respect, and without respect he reacts without love.”

A marriage will be enriched if we just obey these commands of loving and respecting. A man finds it hard to love his wife, and a woman finds it hard to respect her husband. Becoming one is never going to be easy. Marriage is hard work. Love and respect in marriage are solid ingredients to help a couple grow closer to each other.

Communication

Whether with your boss, subordinates, colleagues, or church members, communication is of paramount importance for any relationship to be productive. How much more so in marriage where the mandate is to become one? Can anything replace communication?

In their book *Answers to Marriage*, Bruce and Carol Britten discuss three levels of communication. The first level is

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what we all typically do with even casual acquaintances. This could include a greeting, making a request, a yes or no response to a question, a thank you, or an apology. The second level of communication is when you discuss and deliberate with another person. This typically occurs when decisions must be made.

The third level of communication is the most important in marriage. This level involves sharing your deepest needs, struggles, pain, and sorrow with another person. For a husband and wife, this is the level of communication that determines the depth and strength of your intimacy.

By nature, men generally don't feel as much of a need to share their deepest feelings as women do, so they tend to communicate more briefly. While this can vary greatly depending how much of an extrovert or introvert either spouse may be, women tend to have a much higher need to communicate and share their feelings than men do. Many women who are not content with their marriages will complain about a lack of communication from their husbands.

What is more important in communication—talking or listening? Of course, talking is important, and both husbands and wives should talk to each other. But good listening is a more important key to successful communication, especially if your spouse needs to express his or her deepest feelings.

This is a skill we human beings don't have naturally. From the time we are babies, we grow up telling the world, "Listen to me! I need your attention!" Babies do this by crying. As we become toddlers, we may scream and yell at our parents. As we grow older and expand our vocabulary, we begin articulating our thoughts and needs. We expect everyone else to listen.

In marriage, a huge change takes place. There are now two people in the same room who are used to talking and expressing their own feelings but haven't been adequately trained to listen.

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What happens? Fireworks. Sometimes even ear-deafening explosions. If every husband and wife took time to listen rather than just talk, conflicts would be resolved far more quickly and in a more constructive manner.

Matt came home each day from work and switched on the television while Tabitha was cooking their dinner. She often asked, "So tell me what happened in your day."

"Nothing much," Matt would respond, his attention on the TV program. "Just the same old stuff."

Tabitha didn't like that. She wanted Matt to talk to her after work instead of watching television. One day while Matt was busy on his laptop, she sat down beside him. After a while, Matt turned to look at her and saw tears spilling down her cheeks.

"You should understand how important communication is to me," Tabitha told him. "You're a man, and maybe you don't need it as much. But I'm a woman, and I do need it."

Matt loved Tabitha and was determined to understand her, so he made an effort to talk to Tabitha while she cooked dinner. They started going for walks together where she got an opportunity to express her concerns and all the joys, sorrows, and excitement of her day. Matt was always quick to interrupt with solutions. This annoyed Tabitha, who just wanted a listening ear.

"I don't want you to fix the problems," Tabitha told Matt one day. "Just hear me out."

Matt found this hard but agreed that he wouldn't interrupt. Later that week, he read up on listening and finally understood how important it was for communication, especially when a wife is sharing her deepest feelings. Over the following weeks and months, Matt began sharing his own workplace concerns, struggles, aspirations, and disappointments about his career. Tabitha was happy because Matt was sharing with her while

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Matt was happy that Tabitha was giving him her undivided attention. He realized how much he enjoyed sharing with someone who was willing to just listen and not offer advice.

This experience brought Matt and Tabitha closer together, and their communication has continued to grow over more than fifteen years of marriage. They enjoy each other's company, and both look forward to their "walk and talk" times.

7. Equal But Different

I was so thrilled that I would no longer be using a pencil anymore at school. I had moved up to grade five, where I proudly took a pen in my hand and started using it. I somehow started believing the pen was superior to the pencil. Later in life as I matured, I realised the pen is not superior to a pencil. While they are different, each has their own importance in our life. An artist uses a pencil to come up with an amazing work of art. A writer uses a pen to come up with creative writing. The pen and pencil are different yet equal in value.

Though men and women have equal value in God's eyes, God in his eternal wisdom made them very different from the other with a purpose of bringing them together in marriage. A lack of understanding of how God wired men and women differently can play havoc in a marriage. Despite knowing this fact, I struggled during my early years of marriage to understand my wife's needs. Subconsciously, we expect sameness in our spouses even though we are poles apart in many areas of our life.

In contrast, a fundamental understanding of those differ-

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ences can save many a headache after marriage. In his best-selling book *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus*, author John Gray explains how men and women not only communicate differently but also think, feel, perceive, and do many things differently. For example, when men get stressed, they typically withdraw temporarily into a cave. When women get stressed, they usually share their problems with someone close. Several other major differences are covered in detail in this book.

Love Language

Not all differences between a husband and wife are related to gender. Have you ever wondered why your spouse doesn't respond or feel loved despite your best efforts? This may be because you don't understand your spouse's love language. You are offering your love using a different love language your spouse doesn't understand, and that causes frustration.

This truth is brought out comprehensively by Gary Chapman in his book *The Five Love Languages*. He describes five general categories by which most people typically feel love:

- Words of affirmation
- Quality time
- Works of service
- Receiving gifts
- Physical touch.

Most people have one or two primary love languages that make them feel loved the most. If you know your spouse's love language and show love in that language, he or she feels loved. For instance, a wife may prefer to spend more time with her husband or have help with a chore rather than receive a

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bouquet of flowers or other type of gift. Words of respect and admiration from his wife may be more important to a husband than a well-cooked meal, depending on his love language.

When a person receives love in their own love language, oxytocin, which is called the love drug or love hormone, is released in the body, triggering feelings of love and protection. Speaking the right love language can even make enemies into friends. Just imagine what closeness it can create between a husband and wife. This is why it is so important to make every effort to fill your spouse's emotional "love tank" as often as possible, using their love language in doing so, not your own.

John and Beth had been married for four years but had no clue about love languages. While they loved each other and did their best, they also felt frustration and sometimes wondered why. One day in a marriage seminar, they heard about the five love languages.

"It was a revolutionary thought for both of us," John and Beth shared. "Once we discovered our love languages, we quickly applied them. What a liberating feeling!"

John's love language was works of service while Beth's was quality time. Although they went to restaurants and other outings on weekends, she often complained that John wasn't spending time with her.

"Now I understand why she complained even though I spent most of the weekend with her," John says with a smile. "I wasn't paying attention to her when we went out, so the time I spent with her never translated to quality time."

"John often complained that the house wasn't tidy and he couldn't find his clothing in the closet," Beth added. "I cooked good food for him, which he enjoyed eating, but he continued to be unhappy. Once I learned about his love language, I understood why he wasn't happy. Works of service meant doing things for him that he liked."

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John and Beth have now spent more than two decades together and are helping other couples preparing for marriage.

Temperaments and Personalities

Early in our marriage, I felt uncomfortable with my wife's outgoing personality. She had the expert skill to jump easily into conversation with total strangers in a new setting while I would be looking around for someone I already knew so I didn't have to make new friends. After twenty years of marriage, I celebrate my wife's outgoing personality as do my two daughters. I've tried to learn from her what I can do to improve this weakness in my own personality.

Almost every couple I've spoken with on this topic share similar experiences. Why? Because we each have different temperaments. Tim LaHaye brings out this ancient insight beautifully in his book *Spirit Controlled Temperaments*. He describes four basic temperaments.

Sanguine: These are the fun-loving, extroverted life-of-the-party people who are talkative and people-oriented.

Melancholic: These people are the introverted perfectionists, analytic, organized, and task-oriented.

Choleric: These are the go-getters, ambitious, task-oriented.

Phlegmatic: These are peace-loving, calm, and laid-back people who are also people-oriented.

There are other well-known personality tests that break down temperaments even more specifically. The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator test, for instance, uses sixteen different types. Each can be useful for understanding our spouses as well as colleagues, other family members, and or friends. What is important here is recognising that our spouse may be of a very

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different temperament and understanding those differences is crucial.

Marriages are often the result of opposites attracting. But after getting married, those same opposite characteristics often repel. One spouse's strength can be the other spouse's weakness, and couples with different temperaments will rub against each other's weaknesses. Understanding our differences is liberating. Until we understand them, we end up battling with each other over those differences. But once we understand them, we can appreciate our spouse's differences and how the other person's strengths balance our weaknesses, which in turn fosters greater intimacy between spouses.

Different Needs

Top needs for men and women are also different. Most men will say that a top need is sexual intimacy. Women will more often cite demonstrations of affection, good communication, and feeling secure as top needs. A man who expects his wife to have the same level of sexual drive may think she doesn't really love him. A woman who doesn't understand her husband's sexual needs may feel bitter over what she sees as misplaced priorities. Will they ever become one? It would take a miracle!

Unless we recognize that God made men and women with different needs and commit to satisfying each other's needs selflessly, we will remain self-centred, always expecting our own needs to be met. Imagine the frustration of such a marriage. In his book *His Needs and Her Needs*, Willard F. Harley, Jr. identifies ten top needs of men and women. Meeting those needs for your spouse will lead to a satisfying, affair-proof marriage.

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Sexual intimacy

Sexual intimacy where a man and woman become one is one of the most important and truly satisfying acts in marriage. Sex is like having your favourite ice-cream on a hot summer day. You look forward to eating the ice-cream, you enjoy the taste and coolness, and in the end it satisfies you like nothing else. But it doesn't end there. After a while, you feel like having another ice-cream, and it never feels boring.

It would be an anomaly for a couple to say they are close but don't engage in sexual intimacy. Many married couples these days are so busy in their careers that they are exhausted by the end of the day, and the sexual act becomes less frequent. But for the husband especially, the need only accumulates over the days. If that need isn't met, he becomes more easily susceptible to sexual temptation at work or elsewhere. Writing to the church at Corinth, the apostle Paul reminds husbands and wives of their duty towards each other and the importance of protecting marriage.

But since sexual immorality is occurring, each man should have sexual relations with his own wife, and each woman with her own husband. The husband should fulfil his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband. The wife does not have authority over her own body but yields it to her husband. In the same way, the husband does not have authority over his own body but yields it to his wife. Do not deprive each other except perhaps by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. (1 Corinthians 7:2-5, NIV)

For couples who are sexually pure with their eyes and

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thought life, sexual satisfaction is one of the best parts of marriage. Sexual satisfaction is inversely proportionate to the sexual content viewed from external sources. So the less time you spend on sexually stimulating or sensual movies, TV, YouTube videos, or magazines, the more you will enjoy your sexual relationship with your spouse. You don't have to engage in actual pornography to destroy the joy of sex. The current sexualized content found in popular entertainment can do enough harm.

Another important aspect of sexual intimacy is that both spouses should find satisfaction. While a man may have a stronger sexual drive, a woman also has sexual needs that are too often discounted. It is the husband's responsibility to be sensitive to his wife's needs if they are to grow in their intimacy. A man may initiate the act and find satisfaction, so he believes he and his wife are close. But the husband needs to keep watch to meet his wife's sexual needs too. This is selfless hard work from a man's perspective but worth every moment spent in giving satisfaction to his wife.

The sexual act is not just for young couples but is meant to be life-long, though the frequency may vary as you get older. Studies in the fields of medicine and sociology confirm that a man's sexual drive continues to be as strong when he gets older as when he was a young man. The wife, on the other hand, may feel she is too old and that it is no longer one of the essentials in healthy marriage, which is far from truth. This is where the woman may have to take the initiative to keep her husband satisfied. Tim LaHaye's book *Acts of Marriage* brings out the beauty of sexual love, including "sex after sixty" and five reasons why God created sex.

Dr Cliff and Joyce Penner, Christian sex therapists who have been married for over fifty years, are not ashamed to say they still enjoy sex. Their book *Enjoy! The Gift of Sexual Plea-*

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sure for Women advises women who feel obliged to please their husbands but neglect their own pleasure that this will result in sexual dissatisfaction for both husband and wife and a marriage that falls short of the glorious gift God intended. On one Focus on the Family podcast, this couple shared with host Jim Daly:

The message we are trying to get across here is that the greatest gift a woman can give her husband is to enjoy herself sexually because there is nothing that makes a man feel better than the woman who is experiencing full joy and pleasure in the experience rather than just doing her duty for him. So what we try to show, both in our writing but also in our own life, is that this is a place of fulfilment for the woman, and when the woman feels fulfilled, then the man does.

Sexual intimacy is the best protection within a marriage against affairs and adultery. A marriage where there is sexual purity allows a husband and wife to enjoy sex even much later in life and to continue growing in intimacy throughout their marriage

8. Resolving Marital Conflicts

During the late nineties, stock markets in India did exceptionally well. At my company, we would receive calls from happy customers blessing us because their investments in mutual funds had given them very good returns. A few years later during the dot com bubble, the markets fell sharply. We started getting distress calls and had to calmly and creatively manage our customers.

Conflicts in marriage are like those difficult customers who can't be ignored because that's bad for business. Dealing with these conflicts teaches you how to be selfless and think from the customer's perspective despite things not going your way. They also provide you with innovative ideas to help the customer, not just for the moment but even in the future.

We've talked about how differences between husbands and wives can result in conflict if those differences aren't understood. Many marriages quickly lose their fizz because the couple didn't expect to find themselves in conflict with each other so early in the marriage. Before marriage, conflict wasn't an issue because the only goal was to please each other and get

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married. But once the wedding is over, avoiding conflict becomes increasingly difficult. Especially since many young couples have never learned how to resolve conflict the right way.

When a couple learns how to resolve conflict, they will have learned not just how to preserve their marriage but how to grow and strengthen their marriage. Conflict in itself isn't always bad. In fact, conflict can be good for a marriage just as it can be good for a business as mentioned in my opening analogy.

All close relationships will have conflict for many reasons including our different personalities, upbringing, cultures, style, how we think, our likes and dislikes, moods, current life situations, past successes, failures, and other factors. In fact, if a marriage has absolutely no conflict, it should make you wonder why? The difference in a good marriage is that conflicts should lead to building each other up and in the process building up the marriage.

This is why it is so important that we learn how to resolve conflicts. The honeymoon period doesn't last for long. It is realistic for couples to expect conflicts, whether about trivial things or major issues. But couples who learn how to handle those conflicts will become closer and more intimate with each other.

Ashish and Aarti had an arranged marriage. Both were raised in godly Christian homes with good values. They both prayed and waited on God before accepting the proposal. They were both introverts and adjusted quickly in their new relationship.

When they married, Ashish already had a job while Aarti was looking for a job. After a few months, she finally found one. Monday was her first day of work. On Sunday evening, Aarti told Ashish, "Tomorrow is my first day at work. Could you drop me off by 8:30 a.m.?"

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“Yes, sure,” Ashish answered immediately. “I’ll be ready in plenty of time to have you there by 8:30 a.m.”

The next morning when Ashish dropped Aarti at her new job, she asked, “Could you pick me up at 5:15 p.m. when I get off work?”

Ashish looked at her with raised eyebrows. “Honey, you know I’m still working at that hour, so I’m sorry but I can’t pick you up. Call for a cab. Our house isn’t that far from here.”

Her eyes widening, Aarti responded with words that took Ashish by surprise. “But I’ve never travelled alone in public transport.”

“What?” Ashish asked, his mouth dropping open. “So how did you attend college?”

Her voice dropping almost to a whisper, Aarti admitted, “My dad or someone else would always drop me off and pick me up.”

Ashish picked her up that evening although it was inconvenient for him. But that night they had a long discussion. Aarti was in tears because Ashish wasn’t willing to drop her off and pick her up anymore. Ashish wondered how Aarti’s parents could have raised her so dependent she wasn’t capable of even commuting to work on her own. Ashish assured Aarti that he loved her, but her demands were impossible to fulfil. Aarti felt that if he loved her so much, he should be willing to go through some inconvenience for her.

This was the first big conflict in their marriage. They knew it was a test, and they had to get over it sooner rather than later. They didn’t give up but reasoned with each other. They didn’t break their communication lines. Ashish continued to assure Aarti that he loved her but wanted her to become more independent for her own good. In the long run, that would be best for her.

Aarti understood his reasoning. They prayed about it, and

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she put her trust in God to take care of her on public transport. She is now confident traveling around the city on her own using different modes of transport. Something that was a big cause of conflict has become irrelevant. In the process, their love for each other has strengthened. Aarti knows Ashish loves her, and she respects him for his sacrificial love for her.

Finances

No matter how spiritual or unspiritual a couple may be, finances will sooner or later become a stumbling block in a majority of marriages. Different spending habits, saving habits, and giving practices can all lead to severe tension between spouses. If both spouses are earning an income, the ownership aspect of money and obvious demarcation of what belongs to whom can create a huge crack in marriage. No wonder the Bible states, *“For the love of money is the root of all evil”* (1 Timothy 6:10, NIV).

It is said that money is one of the topmost reasons for discord or divorce between couples. If it is a topmost reason, then shouldn't understanding how to manage our finances be a topmost priority in marriage? And learning how to master this mammoth issue needs to happen as early as possible before it starts impacting the intimacy between husband and wife.

There are a few unchanging fundamentals of money management in marriage that a couple needs to have written down in their hearts so as not to waver. The Christian worldview of money is that it belongs to God. God is the owner of everything. We are mere stewards of what he provides to us. So money doesn't belong just to the spouse who is earning a salary. Both husband and wife are joint stewards. If both spouses are earning an income, the money should get pooled into a single account from which the couple can draw to spend, save, or give.

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It's that simple, but personal egos and pride can come in and destroy a marriage.

"I know I'm not earning anything, so this money belongs to you," Cecilia told her husband Irvin after an argument over certain purchases she'd made. "I won't ever touch your money again."

"No, darling, I'm not inquiring about these purchases because I earn our income." Though Cecilia was a homemaker without an outside job, Irvin hadn't meant to imply the money belonged only to him. "This money belongs to both of us, and we are both equally accountable. I know your qualifications would allow you to earn as much as I do or even more if you chose. It's just that we hadn't budgeted for these items."

Irvin loved Cecilia and never wanted her to feel bad that she wasn't earning an income. But he was a saver and always careful how much they spent. In contrast, Cecilia came from a home where money was never a constraint and was very casual when it came to keeping accounts. They'd been married just two months, and Irvin was trying to teach her about money management.

Cecilia understood her husband's good intentions and started cooperating with him on learning how to budget and be disciplined about their finances. Both had made a commitment before marriage that giving to God would be their highest priority. Irvin worked in the financial services sector and had a good understanding of savings and investments, so they decided to set aside a percentage of their income as savings.

Their discipline in giving, savings, and spending and their partnership in money management helped Irvin and Cecilia to build wealth. Later in life, this gave them financial freedom. Above all, they had no further conflicts in their marriage regarding money. They never allowed money to be their master but mastered their money.

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Hindrances to Growing Intimacy with Spouse

As addressed briefly under the prior pillar on intimacy with God, I can say with certainty after counselling several married couples and from my own marriage that emotional baggage and mental illnesses are two hindrances that can deeply impact the process of intimacy with your spouse. The past certainly haunts the present and brings hopelessness for the future. So if you are dealing with any of these issues, the earlier they are diagnosed and dealt with, the better it will be for your marriage.

Emotional baggage

This could be one of the most underrated topics in marriage. You hardly hear anyone talk about it, but those who carry this baggage in their marriage can testify to the levels of frustration, tension, and anxiety it produces in the marriage and family. Until they have understood how potent it is and take action, they will continue to struggle.

In this generation of corruption, sinfulness, and brokenness, far more people come from broken, dysfunctional homes than emotionally healthy homes. Many people grow up under some type of abuse, toxic criticism, or other kinds of hurt they keep hidden for years until they get married. Under the pressure of marriage, the pain eventually erupts, hurting both self and the spouse. Often, this emotional baggage is the result of growing up under parents who are also imperfect in many ways and struggling in their marriage, so the cycle of dysfunction gets passed on to the next generation.

Jude and Hannah met in the church youth fellowship. They liked each other and committed their relationship to God in prayer. After dating for a year, they decided to get married. Early in their marriage, Hannah found it hard to trust both God

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and Jude. During even minor conflicts on trivial matters, she would lash out at Jude, saying, “I don’t want this marriage. I’ll leave you.”

She would later regret her outbursts, but it took seven long years to build a relationship of trust between the couple. Hannah came to realize that her past emotional baggage was what had caused her anxiety and fear, making it hard to trust her husband. This led to feeling that only separation from Jude would bring relief. Once she understood it was her hurts of the past, they both committed these to God and started working towards a relationship of trust. After more than fifteen years, they are now happily married.

Mental illnesses

Like physical illness, mental illness is something a couple may have to accept and live with. If not identified and treated in time, it can become a stumbling block for intimacy in marriage. It’s not a shame to admit we can suffer mental illness at any point in our life. Deal with it gently and with love.

Also, just because one spouse has such an illness doesn’t mean the other is superior. The other spouse should be humble and gentle with their ill spouse. A husband should continue loving his wife just as Christ loved the church and the woman respect her husband whatever the circumstances (Ephesians 5:33).

As we’ve seen, intimacy with our spouse is the second pillar for building that strong firewall in our marriage. It grows stronger as we continue developing intimacy with our spouse. It becomes weaker when we ignore our spouse or allow hindrances to intimacy to hold us back.

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Mark and Sharon

As Mark finished sharing what it meant to build intimacy with a spouse, Sharon found it hard to control her tears. “I thank God for you, Mark. You have always tried to bring intimacy into our marriage.”

“I thank God for you too, Sharon,” Mark responded, “because you insisted we spend time together and build our marriage. Yes, we are definitely not perfect yet. There are some areas where I really need to change.”

Sharon interrupted him. “And I need to change in so many areas as well.”

Mark opened up his laptop and angled it so they both could see the screen. “Let’s make a list of things we’re good at in this pillar and areas where we need to improve. Why don’t you start.”

“Well, let me see. Hmm, I think communication is something we’re good at,” said Sharon. “Our daily walk and talk time has pretty much taken care of any problems in our communication.”

“Yes, I think that is a strength of ours,” Mark agreed.

“Then there’s the attachment to parents issue,” Sharon brought up. “I think we’ve done a good job of getting closer to each other instead of depending emotionally on our parents.”

“You’re right, Sharon. We honour both our parents but aren’t unduly attached to them in an unhealthy way emotionally.”

“How are we on money?” Sharon asked. “We had some disagreements in this area initially when I didn’t want us using our credit card. But now you manage our finances so well I’m not worried at all. I trust you with our finances.”

“Thank you, ma’am, for trusting me,” Mark said with a smile. “I agree we are doing well on finances.”

Sharon’s brows drew together in a frown. “What about

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conflict resolution in other areas? I'm not so sure we're doing well at resolving our conflicts. What do you think?"

"Umm." Mark nodded agreement. "I think you're right that we haven't learned to manage our conflicts. If you remember last week I tried to tell you something, but we just ended up arguing."

"But that was your fault," Sharon interrupted heatedly. "You weren't willing to look into your own mistakes instead of correcting me. I wasn't wrong. You were wrong!"

Taking her hand, Mark looked down at Sharon with a smile. "Okay, okay, we do need to learn how to manage our conflicts. We'll talk about this conflict later."

They both laughed. Then Mark commented, "You forgot something we're very good at. How could you forget?"

Sharon put her hand on her chin. "Umm, which one? I can't remember."

Mark whispered in her ear. Sharon hit Mark gently with the pillow. "You naughty boy! Just like what the book said, that is number one priority for you men."

With a laugh, they hugged and kissed each other. Both her hands held tightly in Mark's hands, Sharon said thoughtfully. "So intimacy with God and intimacy with spouse are both important. I'm convinced that if every husband and wife practiced this consciously, no one could come between them."

"Yes, you're almost right," Mark said. "But that's still not enough."

"Really? I thought these two pillars are so powerful they guarantee a secure marriage," Sharon responded.

"They are powerful," Mark agreed. "But then life is not so simple. We live in a physical world, but the Bible talks much about a spiritual world for which we need to be prepared. Which brings us to the third and final pillar in building our fire-

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wall, something many couples underestimate and therefore don't put effort into it."

"Sounds intriguing," Sharon said, excitement lighting up her eyes. "So what is this mysterious final pillar? I can hardly wait to find out."

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Questions For Discussion

1. Take a piece of paper or your journal and create three columns. Label the first column “Good,” the second column “Needs improvement,” and the third column “Struggling.”
2. As a couple, go through the lists of items important for intimacy with your spouse mentioned in the last three chapters. Place each in one of the three columns you feel best describes where you are in that area as a couple.
3. Add additional items if you think there are other areas you are either doing well in or need help.
4. Take time in prayer together as a couple to thank God for everything listed in the “Good” column. Commit to God in prayer all the areas listed in columns two and three where you need to improve or are really struggling.
5. Create a plan together to work on areas needing help. For example, if you are not good at communication, consider purchasing a book on communication in marriage, or watching Christian podcasts on YouTube about communication in marriage. If such are available to you, consider attending marriage seminars where principles of good communication within the family are taught.

9. The Spiritual Battle For Marriage

Global health care is a huge industry and growing rapidly. According to [statista.com](https://www.statista.com), the total health spending per person globally in 2019 averaged \$1129USD and is expected to increase to \$1515USD by 2025. Most of us would prefer to have health insurance since sooner or later falling sick is inevitable, often resulting in hospitalisation. Without the coverage of health insurance, out-of-pocket cost for medical care can be huge. Even if a patient manages to pay their hospital bills, they may be left with massive debt. At times, lack of money can even cost someone's life. Let alone the increased stress this financial burden places on the one who is hospitalised.

This imagery is a good analogy of spiritual warfare in our marriages and families. Spiritual attacks in our married life are inevitable sooner or later, and we need the coverage of spiritual "health insurance" to help us survive these attacks. Prayer is like the insurance premiums that must be paid regularly if we are to have health care available to us when we need it. As we spend time in regular prayer, we can trust God to come to our

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rescue when spiritual attacks come along. When we don't have the "insurance" coverage of regular prayer, a marriage will often pay a heavy price, sometimes even divorce.

The subtle attack

"I didn't talk to Susan about anything personal or from the past. In fact, she was there with her husband." Patrick raised his voice as he continued. "Who told you I liked her in the first place? And why do you always suspect me?"

Patrick and Amy both had emotional baggage they'd carried into their marriage from childhood. Amy had witnessed her father's promiscuous behaviour with other women, so her subconscious mind led her to interpret even innocent behaviour as cheating. Patrick had been physically abused by his mother as a child and hated loud arguing and shouting.

This emotional baggage had become a major stumbling block in the progress of their marriage. One day Patrick went to another city for a job interview. While there, he met some old friends, including Susan, a young woman who had once attended the same church as Patrick. When Patrick returned that evening, he told Amy all about his interview and the old friends he'd met. Amy's insecurities immediately flared up, and she accused him of having feelings for this other woman.

Such heated arguments were common in their marriage, and there appeared to be no breakthrough. Finally, Patrick and Amy began seeking help from a mentor. They also did something else that became a turning point for them, not only saving their marriage but enriching it beyond description. They decided to take time together every week for extended fasting and prayer. During this time, they committed their past emotional baggage to God in prayer. After many years of doing this, some of their past still lingers, but prayer has brought a

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refreshing change to their marriage and cemented their relationship.

Spiritual warfare

So should Patrick and Amy stop praying now that everything seems to be settled? Not at all! The point here is that prayer should be proactive to provide ongoing “health care” coverage for future attacks on our marriages and families. Our spiritual battle is lifelong, so our prayers should also be lifelong.

Let’s take a closer look at what the Bible tells us about our spiritual battle. The apostle Paul in his well-known passage on spiritual warfare and the armour of God (Ephesians 6:10-19) describes this struggle well.

For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armour of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground ... And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord’s people. Pray also for me, that whenever I speak, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should. (Ephesians 6:12-20, NIV)

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You have only one enemy

It is no coincidence that Paul's teaching on spiritual warfare in Ephesians chapter six follows right on the heels of his teaching on both families and marriage in the previous chapter. Notice in the above passage who your enemy is. It isn't your spouse, in-laws, children, other family members, or any other person. In fact, our battle isn't against flesh and blood at all but against the spiritual forces of darkness. If you simplify what Paul is writing about in this passage, he is saying that the arguments, fights, and bickering you may be experiencing with your spouse aren't really between the two of you. They may seem to be physically speaking, but in reality the origin of the battle is elsewhere. There is a parallel spiritual world that is instigating the fight and fuelling this war.

In fact, your true enemy comes down to a single individual—Satan. This is made clear in the apostle Peter's first epistle, where he warns the believers:

Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.
(1 Peter 5:8)

What both Peter and Paul are saying in these passages to married couples is in essence, "Hey, you two are not the enemy! The real enemy is Satan."

Think about this. Have you ever had an argument with your spouse over some trivial matter that spirals into a major fight like a war? Later you may wonder why your tempers flared up so much over something so small. You and your spouse are not each other's enemy but friend for life. So instead of fighting each other, you must join hands in fighting the real enemy, the devil himself and his forces of darkness. Satan's deception in making us see our spouses as the enemy is so

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subtle because it keeps us from believing that there is an entire hostile spiritual world we can't see but is very real.

Day of Evil

Notice also that the above passage from Ephesians chapter six tells us that we must put on the armour of God and stand our ground *when*, not *if*, the day of evil comes. Well-known evangelist Tony Evans describes the day of evil in a sermon on prayer and spiritual warfare.

Paul is writing ... to the church at Ephesus to talk to them about the battleground of life. We call it spiritual warfare, but he's not just talking about any kind of battle. He describes this one specifically by calling it the "evil day." The evil day is when all hell breaks loose on you. The evil day is when you are overwhelmed. Yes, life has its normal ups and downs, but that's not what he's talking about here. He's talking about when you are under major attack. When your world is being shattered. Your dreams are being destroyed ... On that day, you're going to need the strength of the Lord. Normal stuff is not going to work. He [Paul] says, "On that day, you're going to need the supernatural."

A spiritual giant depending on prayer

So what is the supernatural power Paul is saying that we need on this evil day if we are to take our stand against the enemy? The apostle Paul was a spiritual giant who had planted many churches and had proclaimed the gospel at the risk of his own life even before rulers and politicians. Yet he not only

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advised believers to “*pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests*” (Ephesians 6:18, NIV) so that they might be able to make a stand against the enemy. He also solicited their prayers for himself “*so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should*” (Ephesians 6:19-20, NIV).

Was Paul some new believer who didn’t know how to share the gospel? Not at all! By this point in his life, he was an expert evangelist with a highly successful ministry. Yet he was asking for prayer as a struggling beginner might ask. Can you remember praying during an exam for help in a subject where you were weak? We pray as if everything depends on it.

Paul asked for prayer that he might speak the mystery of Christ clearly and fearlessly, something that by all appearances he’d already mastered. Was he being sarcastic or just trying to flatter the Ephesian believers? No, he was very sincere. He knew that in the spiritual realm where spiritual warfare takes place, it was vital that he depend on prayer rather than his own abilities, however expert he was.

Pillar three – Prayer cover

Isn’t your marriage a matter of spiritual warfare? Absolutely! As mentioned earlier, there is an invisible warfare going on in the heavenly realms as the forces of evil seek to break apart the two who have become one by God’s design.

Which brings us to our third pillar for building a strong firewall in our marriage—continuous prayer cover. However confident you may be about your marriage, like Paul you would be wise to depend on prayer rather than your own abilities.

All marriages have their day of evil, not once but many times over the course of a marriage. Many couples may experi-

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ence their days of evil early in their marriage while adjustments are taking place. But there will be times of testing and more evil days later in life as well. The only path to long-term victory is proactive prayer. Constant proactive prayer for each other and with each other will help us grow in intimacy with both God and our spouse.

So let prayer be the strategy for your marriage. *Webster's Dictionary* defines strategy as “a careful plan or method for achieving a particular goal, usually over a long period of time.” Another definition is “the science and art of military command exercised to meet the enemy in combat under advantageous conditions.”

A marriage is a long-term relationship and far more fierce at times than a physical battle. The only way to win this battle is through prayer. If there were no spiritual realm or evil one scheming, then it might be fine not to pray proactively for our marriages. But it is because there are indeed spiritual forces of darkness seeking to destroy our marriages and families that proactive prayer is so important.

Daniel's prayer

There is probably no biblical passage that gives a more unique insight into how the spiritual world operates and the ongoing warfare happening there than an encounter described by the Old Testament prophet Daniel. He had received a troubling vision concerning a great war. He went into a three-week period of mourning, fasting, and prayer. In response to Daniel's prayer, God sent a heavenly messenger to explain the vision, but that messenger was supernaturally delayed for those same three weeks, as he explains to Daniel.

I looked up and there before me was a man dressed in

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linen, with a belt of fine gold ... His body was like topaz, his face like lightning, his eyes like flaming torches, his arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze, and his voice like the sound of a multitude ... "Do not be afraid, Daniel. Since the first day that you set your mind to gain understanding and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I have come in response to them. But the prince of the Persian kingdom resisted me twenty-one days. Then Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, because I was detained there with the king of Persia. Now I have come to explain to you what will happen to your people in the future, for the vision concerns a time yet to come."

(Daniel 10:5-14, NIV)

Bible scholars believe the prince of Persia references a fallen angel who had authority or influence over the physical kingdom of Persia, where Daniel was being held in captivity. God's angelic messenger was not able to get through to Daniel until he received help from the archangel Michael, who is the commander of the hosts of heaven (Revelation 12:7) as well as the great angelic prince responsible for protecting the people of Israel in the heavenly realms (Daniel 10:21; 12:1)

What this passage makes clear is that while events are happening in the physical world, there is a corresponding activity in the spiritual realm just as Paul described in Ephesians chapter six. If we are living an obedient life and growing in our intimacy with God, we will be wearing the full armour of God that will protect us from the attacks of the evil one (Ephesians 6:13-17). But just wearing spiritual armour isn't enough. As both Paul and Daniel make clear, it is prayer that mobilizes angelic powers on our behalf to fight the forces of darkness.

10. Prayer Cover For Marriage

“Our marriage is perfectly fine, so we don’t need to pray ... We are managing our marriage pretty well without investing extra prayer time just for that ... I am close to God, and I love my wife, so why should I still be praying for my marriage?”

Few Christians would voice aloud the above sentiments as that would sound arrogant. But they are indeed the unspoken philosophy of many marriages. Sadly, too many couples and families only pray when faced with serious challenges that threaten the marriage and home.

But no matter how good the intimacy we may think we are experiencing with God and our spouse, only a very arrogant, self-satisfied couple would consider praying for their marriage to be unnecessary. On the contrary, just like having that proactive insurance in place for health emergencies that are bound to arise, constant proactive prayer for each other and with each other will help husbands and wives continue growing in intimacy with both God and spouse. Let’s look at some specific areas of prayer that every couple should put into practice to protect their marriage.

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“Lord, I know you are interested in my marriage,” Sam prayed before he met Grace. “I trust you to help me find the right person in my life who will be compatible to me in every sense.”

“Lord, I have so many doubts about marriage,” Grace prayed before meeting Sam. “I lack confidence. If it is your will that I should get married, please bring the right person into my life who will love me.”

God heard their prayers. Sam and Grace found each other, and they knew right from the beginning that it was God who had brought them together. But a few months into their marriage, they began experiencing many conflicts that led to arguments and even fights. This was a setback for Sam and Grace as they believed God had brought them together and never expected all this conflict.

Grace was a woman of prayer. When she was still single, she routinely spent time in fasting and prayer. One day she realised that she’d prayed so much for God to bring the right husband into her life, but now that she was married, she hadn’t been praying for a good marriage. She began praying for her marriage. One day she asked Sam, “Would you join me in fasting and praying once a week?”

Sam instantly agreed. They began praying together for several issues in their life, including God’s protection on their marriage. More than two decades later, this is a practice they continue. They have seen the difference it made in their life and won’t trade this time with anything else.

It isn’t uncommon to pray a lot while we are seeking our spouse. Our prayers are very detailed, and we are so devoted to finding just the right person. I prayed frequently and systematically before God led me to my wife.

But what do we do after we find the right person? It’s like receiving admission into a good college. We pray, prepare thor-

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oughly for the entrance exams, and rejoice when we are finally admitted. But that's only the beginning. Admission into a good college doesn't guarantee a degree.

Something similar happens in marriage. Finding and marrying the right person doesn't guarantee a fulfilled marriage. Coming together is the easy part. Staying together is the difficult part. After getting married, we must not only work on our marriage but also pray much for our marriage. Prayer is the secret to keeping a couple together. And praying to become the right person is as important as praying to find the right person.

Praying for each other

Before we get married, our prayers are mostly directed towards self. Yes, we do pray for others but never with that same fervour and passion. No one is so invested in anyone's life as much as that person. We pray for our personal spiritual growth, job, health, and many other things with so much devotion we hardly bother praying for anyone else.

But after getting married, all that should change. We pray not just for ourselves but for our spouse with the same fervour and passion. The wonderful thing about praying for your spouse is that you are the direct beneficiary. Who wouldn't want a godly spouse?

In her bestselling books *Power of a Praying Wife* and *Power of a Praying Husband*, Christian author Stormie Omartian brings out many areas of each other's life that a spouse can pray for. Some things she listed for husbands to pray on behalf of their wives include her spirit, emotions, priorities, relationships, beauty, sexuality, fears, and deliverance. Some things she listed for wives to pray on behalf of their husbands include his work, finances, sexuality, temptations, health, integrity, reputation, and deliverance. My wife and I followed her advice in our own

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marriage and have recommended the books to many other couples who have been immensely blessed.

Praying for your spouse is one of the best gifts you can ever give to your spouse. God answering your prayers for your spouse is one of the best things you will ever see happen in your lifetime. Just imagine a marriage where both spouses pray for each other's life in detail and see transformation happening.

I have seen this happen in my own marriage, and I plead with you to stay committed to prayer for your spouse all your life. Pray that God will show you what is lacking in you and needs to change. Pray that God will open your eyes to the truth about your own weaknesses that may hinder your marriage. Pray that God will help you with your own responsibilities in marriage.

Many emotional baggage issues of the past surface only in marriage, and the only way we can find victory is through prayer. We already saw in chapter two on patterns in separation how issues of the heart are magnified when they are brought into marriage. What if your spouse has problems with pornography? Prayer for deliverance can free your spouse from this evil. Issues of the heart like selfishness, unforgiveness, pride, and anger as well as emotional baggage, mental illness, and sometimes physical illness are among the most difficult to handle after marriage. As a couple prays for each other, God will bring deliverance and healing.

Mike and Clara were newly married when Clara realised that Mike smoked cigars on the weekends. She didn't like it and expressed her displeasure. To Mike, this was his relaxation on weekends, and he felt it was perfectly all right, so he continued smoking for a couple months. Clara was disappointed, but instead of arguing about it, she took the issue to God, praying sincerely that God would open Mike's eyes to a habit she felt wasn't healthy or glorifying to God.

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“I started realising it was never going to be okay with Clara,” Mike says. “So I didn’t see any reason to hold on. Our marriage is too important.”

Mike quit his habit of smoking cigars and hasn’t touched one since. Prayer may seem simple, but it’s so powerful it can protect a marriage from the worst of adversaries.

Pray for protection of your marriage

When Paul wrote to the church of Ephesus about spiritual warfare, he mentioned several things not covered so vividly in his other epistles. For one, he explains just why it is so important to put on God’s spiritual armour.

Put on the full armour of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes. (Ephesians 6:11, NIV)

It is clear that the devil is scheming against God’s people and their lives, which includes our marriages. Satan knows us well. He seems to have a database of our life, past, hurts, struggles, and baggage. He uses those against us through his cunning schemes.

In the same letter, Paul also writes about letting anger give the devil a foothold in our lives.

In your anger do not sin: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold. (Ephesians 4:26-27)

These verses and the passages we examined in the last chapter demonstrate clearly that there is an invisible spiritual realm from which the evil one, Satan, is attacking us. He is the

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real enemy, not our spouse. In his book *Defending Your Marriage*, Dr. Tim Muehlhoff writes comprehensively on this topic of spiritual warfare and marriage. After extensive research, he has identified top indicators of spiritual warfare in a person's life. These include uncontrolled anger, a sense of impending doom, violent dreams, no longer believing the best about God, no longer believing the best about yourself, and unforgiveness. If you see any of these indicators in your marriage, beware because this could indicate a spiritual attack on your marriage.

Couples often pray or ask for prayer when they are in a crisis or after the damage is already done. That is reactive praying. Why do we not feel the need to pray before challenges come along? That is proactive praying. Proactive means controlling a situation by making things happen or by preparing for possible future problems. Reactive is acting in response to a situation rather than creating or controlling it. Paul asked his readers to pray proactively.

And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people. (Ephesians 6:18, NIV)

If we are exhorted to keep on praying for all the Lord's people, how much more so for our spouses who are primary targets of the devil's schemes. Pray that God will protect your marriage from the attack of the enemy. Ask others boldly for prayer to protect your marriage.

Importance of prayer in marriage

Prayer is mighty against the forces of evil. In fact, eigh-

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teenth-century British theologian John Wesley once said, “God will do nothing but in answer to prayer.” Similarly, God will do nothing in your marriage that is not in answer to prayer for the protection of your marriage. American cleric E.M. Bounds states it this way.

God shapes the world by prayer, The more praying there is in the world, the better the world will be, the mightier the forces against evil.

In his book *Destined for the Throne*, Christian author, educator, and television host Paul Billheimer writes:

Heaven holds the key by which decisions governing earthly affairs are made, but we hold the key by which those decisions are implemented. Prayer is not overcoming reluctance in God. It is not persuading him to do something he is unwilling to do. It is “binding upon earth that which already has been bound in heaven” (Matthew 16:19). It is implementing his [God] decision. It is enforcing his will upon earth. Prayer makes possible God’s accomplishing what He wants and what he cannot do without it.

So will you not pray for the protection of your own marriage? The more consistently you pray for the protection of your marriage, the more consistently you will experience the protection God gives to your marriage. Prayer will give you insight and wisdom into your marriage. You will recognise your own weaknesses along with your spouse’s weaknesses. You will then be able to make the necessary changes to your life that will enrich and bless your marriage. Without prayer, this is difficult

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to accomplish. Prayer will give you the power and strength to find victory in your struggles.

Mary was insecure about her marriage. She often doubted her marriage would survive since she saw many marriages that were either mediocre or struggling to survive. She began praying, “Oh Lord, please protect our marriage from any harm or evil. Please help me overcome this fear.”

As she continued in prayer, Mary eventually found victory from these fears. Although she still experiences some struggles, she is now far more confident about her marriage.

As Stormie Omartian advises, “Don’t allow your enemy to steal your marriage out from under you. Fight for it in prayer.

11. Hindrances To Prayer In Marriage

Petitions are made for a good job, promotion, salary hikes, and bonus. Intercessions are made for lost souls, family, and friends. Supplications are made for government, economy, and corporations. Prayers are made during sickness, trials, and temptations. We plead with God for our children, their future, and security. We pray for almost everything but our marriages. Why is that so? If prayer is so important for marriage, why is it that so many Christian couples don't pray specifically for their marriage.

As I've spoken to many couples, a common response has been, "We never felt the need to pray specifically for our marriage. This is definitely an area where we need to improve."

Some even wondered why they hadn't thought to pray for their marriage. It almost seems as though our enemy has distracted or tricked Christian couples to keep us from praying. That said, I've seen several specific reasons why couples don't pray.

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Lack of time

Busy work schedules is one big reason why many couples find it hard to pray, let alone praying specifically for their marriage. Their days are occupied with legitimate responsibilities like careers, church, cooking, cleaning, sleeping, weekend outings with family, social engagements, hobbies, reading the Bible, learning, and many other things that are good and add value to life. In addition, the day gets crowded with electronic devices, social media, entertainment, and many other things that add little or no value to life.

If someone tries to harm us, we take quick action to protect ourselves. We may inform the police or local authorities or church. We would certainly drop everything else and take time to handle this threat. All because we can see and feel the peril facing us.

If we understood and could estimate the real threat to our marriage from the evil forces of the invisible spiritual realm, we would also take time to plead with God for help. So now that we are aware how the enemy of our marriage is targeting us, shouldn't we take time out to pray for our marriage?

Making Our Marriage a Low Priority

This is a similar problem to a lack of time. Everyone has limited time in a day, so what ultimately helps us find time is prioritisation. Where does marriage fit in terms of priority for a couple? The answer to this will determine whether you take time to pray for your marriage. Children, career, parents, health, money, hobbies, church ministry, friends, and many other things are often a higher priority for a couple than their marriage. None of these are sinful, and all have a place in our lives. But should they be higher in priority than our marriage?

Young mothers naturally place their children above their

Hindrances To Prayer In Marriage

husbands. A young man who is just starting off in his career often places his career above his wife. A busy church minister places ministry above his wife. Petitions are offered first for those who are higher in priority. Young parents who love their children will pray for their children's future, academics, and college admissions more than for their marriage. A church pastor will often pray for his congregation more than his marriage. A young man who is ambitious about his job will often pray for his career more than his marriage.

Is your marriage a high priority? You will then pray for it often. If marriage is not your priority, find out why this is so. Prioritise your marriage, and you will pray for your marriage. You will then see how God works in your marriage.

Laziness

Prayer is not an exciting activity like pursuing an ambition. Our daily activities are mostly those that we must do or those we love to do. Even if we don't like our job, we do our best to go to our workplace because that provides us the required finances. We love watching television because it provides us entertainment. We may go playing golf or tennis because these provide us pleasure and help keep our bodies fit.

By nature we won't do anything that doesn't provide us excitement, pleasure, or visible gratification. If we don't like an activity, we are lazy about doing it and often procrastinate. For example, cleaning the house is not a pleasurable activity. So if we don't need to clean some part of the house, we will postpone that activity until it becomes necessary.

Something similar happens in prayer. One reason many couples don't pray is because of laziness. On one hand, we don't see it as an essential activity. On the other hand, we don't have the natural drive to pray. So we procrastinate prayer until

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we really must pray, which is when things spiral out of our control.

Praying for our marriage requires effort and a strong purpose. Those families who take time to pray regularly and make it a habit will see and feel the benefits. They will no longer need external motivation.

Lack of faith or faulty prayers

Our generation can't wait. We live in a world of instant gratification where any action is expected to have a quick desired response. In reality, we live by sight, not by faith. If Amazon or some other popular e-commerce vender offers an instant discount on a product, we buy it. If they were to promise a discount after a year or two, not many would opt for that.

Faith is waiting on God patiently for the answer. Many couples don't pray for their marriages even if they are facing very challenging issues because of lack of faith. Many have experienced unanswered prayers so they've given up. Others have given up on their marriages because their prayers weren't answered quickly enough or the way they wanted. Many husbands and wives will pray for their spouse to change instead of asking God to change them.

Willy prayed for many years that his wife Jane would change, explaining, "She isn't a believer. She is immature and lacks godly values."

He even counselled her and made others counsel her. Eventually when Jane was unable to live any longer with his criticism, she left him and returned to her parents' home. Willy began verbally abusing her over the phone. He finally decided it was no use to continue praying for her. He never asked God

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to open his own eyes or prayed for change within himself since he was convinced that he was perfectly fine.

There is no substitute to prayer for your marriage if you want to see a blessed and fulfilling marriage that bears abundant fruit. Fruit that can be enjoyed by the couple who prays and also by others whom they influence. Which is why this third pillar is so vital if we are to see a strong firewall protecting our marriage. This pillar grows stronger as you pray and weaker when you give up prayer.

Mark and Sharon

“Oh, I love this pillar!” Sharon said excitedly, lifting her face prayerfully upward with folded hands and eyes tightly closed. “This is my favourite.”

Opening her eyes, she continued, “I agree with you, Mark, that this pillar must be the most underestimated. Oh, how I wish Alia had known this! She would have never got divorced. Mark, we need to tell the whole world about these pillars. Especially this third pillar about covering marriages with prayer. How many marriages could be saved by putting this pillar into practice?”

“I couldn’t agree with you more, Sharon,” said Mark. “It is such an important pillar, but so few practice it. I will be ever grateful to you, Sharon, for initiating this practice in our marriage. I can feel God’s protection over our marriage due to our weekly fasting and prayer together.”

“And thank you, Mark, for so promptly agreeing to pray with me when I asked you. I cherish this time of prayer together. If there is one thing that has helped us overcome our challenges because of my emotional baggage, it is prayer. I will never trade this time of prayer for anything in the world. This book has only strengthened my resolve to pray regularly.”

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Sharon smiled brightly at Mark. “So now our marriage is secured! We are growing in intimacy with God. I think we are intimate with each other. We pray for our marriage. But I do have one question.”

Looking down at her folded hands, Sharon paused for a few seconds before looking up again at Mark. “What if I drift away from being intimate with God? What will happen then? What if I stop reading the Bible for an extended period of time and become disconnected from God?”

“Very good question, Sharon,” Mark responded. “I wish every couple asked this question. In fact, that is what the next chapter of this book is about—assessing the risk in marriage. What happens if any one pillar becomes weak or even two? How does that affect the marriage?”

“Well, that’s a real eye-opener,” Sharon commented. “In fact, now that I think of it, Alia wasn’t really living strong in her faith when she got divorced. She was so focused on her career that she’d quit attending church or prayer meetings. I doubt if she was intimate with God. And she and her husband were both so busy they didn’t find time for each other, so no intimacy with their spouse either.”

“And they certainly weren’t praying for their marriage,” Mark added. “That’s a perfect recipe for separation.”

“That means every couple needs to have all three pillars, and if even one is weak or missing, that marriage is in danger,” Sharon summed up in dismay.

“You’re right,” Mark agreed. “So let’s dig into the next chapter and see how we can avoid such risk in our own marriage.”

Hindrances To Prayer In Marriage

Questions For Discussion

1. Do you remember a time when you felt there was an attack on your marriage from the spiritual forces of darkness? How did you deal with it?
2. Do you pray as a couple often and regularly for your marriage?
3. What specific issues in your marriage do you think need covered in prayer? Make a list of all you feel are necessary to strengthen your marriage.
4. Set a time together as a couple and pray through the list you've created.

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Thank you for choosing to read this book.

You have completed two sections of this book.

Two more sections to go.

How did you find it so far? I am hoping you are enjoying.

You can drop a message at connect@frankyfernandes.com

Thanks

Happy reading the rest of the book!

Section Three:

ASSESSING THE RISK

This is a crucial section because it will give you a worm's eye view of your own marriage. We will cover what are the security lapses that occur in marriage in one chapter. In the remaining chapters, we will examine eight different types of marriages with varying risks and protection. One end of the spectrum will reveal a high-risk marriage while the other end reveals a no-risk marriage. You will see where your own marriage fits into the spectrum of these eight types.

12. Security Lapses In Marriage

The 2020 global Covid-19 pandemic will be forever etched in our memories. Each person who lived through the pandemic has different experiences to share, and the many waves and variants of the virus taught us many lessons. But some things never changed throughout the pandemic. Among these were the protocols of wearing a mask, social distancing, and sanitising of hands. Many people were infected with the virus because they didn't follow these three protocols.

In other words, there were security lapses. To avoid infection, you had to follow all three instructions. If any one of the three protocols was left out, you were quite likely to get infected. Many people caught the virus because of their own carelessness. They often didn't know when or where it happened.

The three pillars for securing your marriage—growing in intimacy with God, growing in intimacy with your spouse, and prayer cover for marriage—are much like the protocols for avoiding Covid-19 (that both are three in number is only coincidental!). These three pillars build the firewall around your

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marriage. If all three are present in a married couple, it's impossible to breach the marriage. But if any of the three pillars are missing, the marriage is likely to be weakened because of the lack of security.

Sometimes only one of the three pillars may be weak or completely missing. At other times, two may be weak or missing. These missing pillars expose the marriage to danger, placing it at risk. Marriages on the verge of breakup often have all three pillars weak or completely broken.

No one consciously exposes their marriage to risk and danger. In the busyness of life, a couple may not even know their marriage is under attack just as so many were attacked by the Covid-19 virus without even knowing it was happening. Only on hindsight would they recognize where they might have been infected and what protocol they'd left out to be contaminated.

Weakening pillar

Nathan travelled on business and was away from his family for a month. One day he went to a mall. Within minutes, he came face to face with a beautiful, well-dressed young woman. The perfume she wore reminded him of his wife. After being away from his wife for a full month, the young woman was certainly a strong temptation.

"No!" he told himself firmly, shaking his head. He went further on into the mall. But a few minutes later, he ended up at a grocery store counter with the same young woman standing in front of him at the counter.

"Why, Lord?" he prayed silently. Quickly paying for his groceries, he left the mall in a hurry. Once at his hotel, he had a quick dinner at the restaurant and headed to his room. To distract himself, he switched on the TV. Within minutes, he

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was watching an intimate love scene. While watching, he thought about how much he missed his wife and longed to be intimate with her.

He knew he should turn off the movie, but he gave in to temptation and continued watching. It wasn't long before he felt guilty. Switching off the TV, he confessed his wrongdoing to the Lord. He realised that he'd stayed away from his wife for too long. He was a strong believer who loved God and spent time reading the Bible. He also loved his wife very dearly and had been praying for God's protection over his marriage. Though he didn't commit adultery, he'd experienced a slip-up because his legitimate needs weren't being met.

Nathan made arrangements to get back home to his wife. If he'd continued on for a few more weeks or months away from home, who knows what might have happened? He would have continued struggling with these temptations and very likely would have succumbed eventually by either lusting in his mind or potentially giving in to committing adultery. Nathan was able to withstand temptations to a certain extent because of his intimacy with God and his prayer cover for his marriage. But his intimacy with his wife had been compromised because of his travel.

Many men and women travel on business and even for ministry away from their spouses for weeks and months at a time. They are exposing their marriage to attack from their enemy because they leave one door open for too long. Many marriages have been breached in this manner, eventually ending up in tragedy.

The above is just one example of a security lapse where intimacy with your spouse is missing. There could be other examples where some other pillars are missing. For example, either or both spouses become distanced from God because they are so preoccupied with their jobs or ministry. Another

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couple could be neglecting their prayer time as a family so that there is no cover for the marriage. These are situations where some of the pillars go missing.

Security matrix box

The diagram below is a security matrix box* that indicates how secure a marriage is. As indicated in the diagram, there are many ways in which a marriage can be exposed to attack. The shaded boxes are those that are exposed. Each column (vertical) has a header or label that describes a type of marriage, and each row (horizontal) consists of one of the three pillars.

A combination of three rows and one column is one security matrix box, and the crosses or checks in each column indicate the marriage's status against each pillar. For example, the most secure marriage (extreme right box) shows three checks (✓) including all three pillars of intimacy with God, intimacy with spouse, and prayer cover for marriage. The most insecure marriage (second box to the left) shows three crosses (✗) in that column, indicating this marriage is missing all three pillars.

Firewall pillars	Most insecure marriage	Little hope for marriage	Self-dependent marriage	Protected self-dependent marriage	Singlehood marriage	Protected singlehood marriage	Self-confident marriage	Most secure marriage
Intimacy with God	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓
Intimacy with Spouse	✗	✗	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓	✓
Prayer cover	✗	✓	✗	✓	✗	✓	✗	✓

In the following eight chapters, we will go through each of these eight security matrix boxes in detail, following the same pattern in every chapter. We will begin with a true story that

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has been suitably edited so that the couple's real identity is not revealed. If you think it sounds similar to your own story, trust me that this is purely providential and believe that God wants to tell you something through the similarities. We will then look at the five following elements for each type of marriage.

- Current state of such marriages.
- Description of the three pillars specific to such marriages.
- Possible reasons that led to this state.
- Possible consequences.
- Conclusion and solution.

*Please note that these security matrix boxes are laid down based on the author's own experience and interviews with numerous married couples and the teaching material developed for the three pillars. The boxes are not research-driven or any scientifically-proved diagram.

13. Most Insecure Marriage

Intimacy with God	X
Intimacy with spouse	X
Prayer cover for marriage	X

“What kind of man are you?” Betty often yelled at her husband Aaron. “You are lazy! My dad is so active even now at seventy. You are not half as active as he is!”

Aaron and Betty fell in love while they were in college. A few years later, they married and had a daughter. For the first few years, they lived happily and loved each other. They went on vacations, gave gifts to each other, and all seemed well. But they gradually began having serious differences, and their conflicts were not resolved. Aaron was a phlegmatic in temperament (see chapter seven on temperaments), and he was beginning to feel that Betty, who was choleric in temperament, wanted to control him.

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Due to Aaron's laidback temperament, he bore Betty's abuse for several years before snapping. He stopped talking to his wife and completely withdrew from the relationship. Some friends of the couple offered to help. One friend connected them with a family counsellor, but this didn't help much because Betty refused to take instructions.

Both Aaron and Betty have weak faith. They go to church more as a social obligation and were never committed to God. At this point, they are both very stubborn and don't want to come back together. They continue to find fault with each other and remain married solely because of their daughter.

Current state of marriage

You will notice in the security matrix box above that all three pillars of a secure marriage are missing. There is no relationship with God, no closeness between spouses, and prayer is completely missing. This is an example of the most insecure type of marriage even though the couple started off well and seemed quite suitable for each other. All marriages that are on the brink of separation or the couple has already separated typically fall into this matrix box. Let's look at each pillar described earlier to understand what is happening in these marriages.

Intimacy with God: If you analyse couples on the brink of separation or already separated, you will find that both or either are at the lowest level in their faith and commitment to God. Both or either also have no commitment to the institution of marriage. This stems primarily from their lack of commitment to God in the first place. At this point of their marriage, God is not first priority. The teachings of the Bible have no value in their life. If friends and relatives counsel them, the differences

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seem irreconcilable to the couple, even if not to others. Other people may think their reasons for separation are trivial. Which isn't to say that only trivial reasons lead to separation. There are sometimes major reasons, too.

In the section on intimacy with God, we looked at many reasons why intimacy with God is important for the marriage. For example, lack of forgiveness and accumulated bitterness over the years is a common reason for the breakup of a marriage. Those who have grown in their relationship with God are willing to forgive their spouse because they understand God has forgiven them.

Intimacy with spouse: There is no love for each other in this type of marriage. The couple may be sleeping in separate beds or different rooms. They continue to stay with each other for the sake of their children or to retain the respect of their church, society, or community. But the marriage has reached a dead end. Communication is at the lowest level (see chapter on intimacy with spouse) with the couple basically living separate lives. The husband displays no love for his wife while she may not show him respect when they interact. They have empty love tanks because they don't know each other's love language (see chapter on intimacy with spouse). They may be much closer to their respective parents, siblings, or other family members than to each other.

The husband may be busy with his career, friends, hobbies, sports, or even church ministry while the wife is busy with her work, house chores, children, friends, watching TV, or hobbies. Obviously, their emotional and physical needs are not being met. They show no interest in restoring their marriage. Life goes on like the two separate train tracks running parallel to each other.

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Prayer cover for the marriage: God is not a priority for such couples, so they obviously don't come together to pray. If they were committed to God and sincerely came together to pray, they would be led to pray for their marriage since one prays when there is a great need in life. But in such marriages, the couple doesn't feel a need to come together or even want to come together, so they will never pray for their marriage. How sad since if they had kept this matter in prayer, God would have reignited their marriage.

Reasons leading to this state

Most marriages begin well. Initially, there are factors that sustain the marriage such as intimacy between spouses and commitment of both spouses to the marriage. But marriage is hard work. It doesn't happen naturally or effortlessly. Couples are often willing to work on their marriage at the beginning, but as time goes on, the commitment to each other and the marriage weakens. No one plans for this to happen, but a rift gradually opens.

There could be several reasons. For example, busyness in one's career and a lack of time for God and spouse are major reasons I've seen for marriages to start breaking up. Their careers become the top priority for these couples. They fall into the trap of wanting to make a lot of money. They think this is temporary and that after they have enough money, they can slow down and live a comfortable life. But they don't realise this pursuit of money is actually stealing away their marriage.

Other reasons include being too busy in church or ministry, unhealthy attachment to parents by either or both spouses, continual travel away from spouse, lack of communication, preoccupation with social media or entertainment, unresolved conflicts, anger, bitterness, unforgiveness, issues in managing

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finances, lack of time spent with God, lack of family prayer and devotional time. In short, anything that takes the couple away from God and each other and prevents them from prayer for their marriage.

Consequences of this state

In this type of marriage, all three pillars or firewalls around the marriage are broken. This means that the enemy has taken more than a foothold in these marriages. He is in full control, and God's control over his own design of marriage has been completely cut off by the couple.

Since both spouses are distant from God and their basic needs are not met, they can be easily attracted to the opposite sex. In fact, some may be actively looking for another relationship outside of marriage. They can be easily tempted by pornography, erotic novels, and other material that gratifies the needy flesh.

Because they don't have intimacy with God, they don't have the inner strength to withstand temptation. Just as someone with a compromised immune system is susceptible to any bacteria or virus, they are too weak and powerless to resist the schemes of the evil one. Since they haven't prayed for their marriage, that lies vulnerable to the attacks of the spiritual forces of darkness and the seduction of the world. This is a most insecure marriage and without hope. It's only a matter of time before it eventually leads to separation if it hasn't already. Sometimes a couple may not be legally separated, but they are emotionally separated and live separate lives.

If these couples have children, living in such hostile and sometimes violence-prone homes will have harmful effects on the children. As we saw in introductory chapters, such children

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go through emotional insecurity, poor academic performance, anxiety issues, mood swings, and mental health problems.

These have a long-term impact on children. Seeing their parents get divorced or live separate lives gives them a very sub-standard view of marriage. Growing up in dysfunctional homes affects their spiritual life, personal lives, and eventually their careers and marriages. Many of these children will never be exposed in their homes to the gospel or the God of the Bible. Chances are high that the cycle of broken relationships will continue because of the emotional baggage they carry unless they make a conscious attempt to break the cycle with God's help.

Conclusion and solution

How would you evaluate your own marriage? Do you think it might be in a most insecure position right now? Or is it gradually drifting toward becoming most insecure? Then you need to ask yourself the following urgent questions.

How is my intimacy with God? Are there issues of the heart (see chapter on patterns in separation) I'm struggling with? Is there any past emotional baggage that is hindering my relationship with God? How is my spouse's intimacy with God? Is it a growing relationship, or are we both backsliding?

Also, how is my intimacy with my spouse? Are we growing closer to each other? Are there reasons preventing us from growing closer like our jobs, our relationship with parents and in-laws, a communication breakdown, or something else?

Finally, how much are we praying to God for the protection of our marriage? Are we praying for each other at all? How is our family altar?

If all three firewall pillars are on shaky ground, then your marriage is already down that path. Do everything you can to

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save your marriage even if you somehow feel it really isn't all that bad. You don't want a shock later in life. Even worse, if all three pillars are completely missing, nothing but a restoration of those three pillars will lead to the rescue of your marriage.

If you are feeling anxious that your marriage may be on the path to becoming an insecure marriage, then you need to read on and identify where your marriage is right now. Once you identify which security matrix box best describes your marriage, you will know the specific deficiency that must be addressed. You can then take the right action to prevent your marriage from becoming like this one.

14. Little Hope For Marriage

Intimacy with God	X
Intimacy with spouse	X
Prayer cover for marriage	✓

Sam couldn't sleep that night. He had refused to give his wife Anita a divorce. They were now living under the same roof but slept in different rooms and lived virtually separate lives.

Sam and Anita had fallen in love while doing their undergrad studies. After Sam got a job, he proposed to Anita, and they got married. They loved each other dearly, and God blessed them with two beautiful girls.

All seemed well until Sam experienced a transformational change in his faith. From being a nominal Christian who attended church as a weekly ritual, he now became strong in his faith. This displeased Anita, who was not so committed to

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her faith. When Sam began sharing his newfound faith with Anita, she was greatly annoyed.

“Don’t preach or push your faith on me,” she told her husband. “I am happy the way I am.”

Anita began distancing herself from Sam, which hurt him deeply. After some time, she stopped talking to him altogether. One day Sam received a shock.

“I want to separate legally from you,” Anita informed him. “I want a divorce.”

Sam has not given up on their marriage. He continues to pray that God will one day open Anita’s eyes to the truth and that she too will commit herself fully to her Christian faith.

Current state of marriage

This is a marriage hanging on just one thread—prayer. Both intimacy with God and with the other spouse are absent. Either one spouse or both are not close to God. One spouse may be praying for the marriage, but otherwise such marriages are identical to the “most insecure marriage” described in the previous chapter. There is therefore little hope for this marriage. Let’s look at each of the three firewall pillars in connection to this type of marriage.

Intimacy with God: There are many marriages where one spouse is committed to God and the other isn’t. Lee Strobel is the best-selling Christian author of multiple books such as *The Case for Christ*. But before he found faith in Christ, he hated the fact that his wife had become a Christian. He wanted to leave her because her life changed so much after she put her faith in Christ. But his wife continued to pray for him, and despite his best efforts to prove her wrong in her faith, he even-

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tually ended up giving his life to Jesus. This led to a blossoming of their marriage.

There are also marriages where both spouses have left their faith or never did believe in God. When one or both spouses are not intimate with God, this keeps the gates wide open for the enemy to infiltrate and bring damage to the marriage. Even if just one spouse has an intimate relationship with God, in the long term the unbelieving spouse's lack of faith can destroy such a marriage. Intimacy with God provides your marriage with a strong firewall.

Intimacy with spouse: As in the most insecure marriage described in the last chapter, these marriages also lack intimacy between spouses. There is no love left in the marriage, and the spouses are living separate lives with husband and wife both busy with their respective jobs, friends, and other occupations. Obviously, their emotional and physical needs are not being met. This exposes the marriage to the cunning tricks and temptations of the enemy.

Such couples may remain married for selfish reasons, whether because they have children together or to avoid losing the respect and good opinion of their church, social circle, or community. They may make a lot of outward noise of being a successful marriage and family, but communication remains at the lowest very superficial level (see section on intimacy with spouse), and spouses express no respect for each other in the home. One or both spouses may be overly attached to their respective families rather than to each other. As the years go by, neither spouse has any interest in recommitting to their marriage.

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Prayer cover for marriage: Such marriages are literally surviving only because of prayer, either from one or both spouses, or from family, friends, or church members who are praying for the marriage. Even if one or both spouses don't have intimacy with God or with each other, those spouses may still be praying out of hope that their marriage can be revived.

Can such a marriage be turned around? Definitely! That is the power of prayer. The Christian movie *War Room* brings out this reality very beautifully. In the movie, the husband and wife, Tony and Elizabeth, are just going through the motions of their marriage when Elizabeth meets an elderly praying woman who encourages and motivates Elizabeth to pray for her marriage. She does so sincerely. Tony is at the point of slipping into an adulterous relationship, but his wife's timely prayer prevents him from committing that act. While fiction, this movie holds much truth. Just like the dead bones that came to life when the prophet Ezekiel prayed (Ezekiel 37), a dead marriage can be brought back to life by prayer. For Lee Strobel and his wife, prayer is what saved their marriage.

Reasons leading to this state

Marriages end up in this particular category primarily because God isn't a priority in the life of one or both spouses. There are several reasons why this can happen. Common factors are high pressure jobs, materialism, religiosity, and a short-term view of life. Those committed to God early in marriage can backslide later in life when they stop spending time with God, reading the Bible, praying, and doing other things that provide balance like church attendance and Bible study.

When you neglect or ignore the Creator and Designer of your marriage who alone can sustain that marriage, you are

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inviting trouble. On the contrary, since God is the one who designed marriage and every other aspect of our lives, we would be wise to simply commit ourselves to God and ask him to lead us through what he has designed for us.

Marriage must be carefully nurtured if it is to flourish in the long-term. Initially, the emotions of excitement and pleasure will carry a marriage forward. But sooner rather than later, you need deliberate intentional will to carry it through.

Marriage is not for self-seeking but involves continuous giving. This includes spending time with each other, communicating, resolving conflicts, forgiving, and doing things selflessly for each other. The ups and downs of life make it even harder to stick to the relationship unless both spouses build it together. Intimacy with each other should be prized over all other human relationships. Many couples give up halfway through just because life doesn't go as they expected.

Consequences of this state

In this marriage, two important pillars or firewalls around the marriage—intimacy with God and intimacy with spouse—are broken. Prayer is the only remaining pillar that sustains this marriage. Couples whose needs aren't met will feel a strong urge to fulfil these needs. If they aren't strong in their faith and don't believe that God hates adultery, they will easily succumb to the enemy's temptations.

Unfortunately, needs that aren't met in marriage can only too easily be met in the outside world, providing immense pleasure and relief, as the enemy knows well, but not without violating God's principles for marriage. For example, a wife whose emotional needs aren't met will derive great pleasure when another man gives her a listening ear where she can pour out all her struggles and pain. This can lead to emotional

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bonding outside of marriage and eventually physical closeness.

Likewise, a husband whose sexual needs aren't being met can easily be attracted to a woman willing to fulfil those needs. There may be less harmful consequences than outright adultery such as pornography, erotic novels, and other sexualized material. But these still usurp the place of the spouse. Because these men and women don't have intimacy with God or their spouse, they don't have the inner strength or resolve to withstand temptation.

This leaves prayer to take the full load of maintaining this injured and almost broken relationship. If only one spouse is praying, there will be a tough, long road ahead. But as in the case of Sam and Anita, don't give up. If the second spouse also realises that prayer can save the marriage and joins their spouse in prayer, there is more hope. Prayer is the starting point to restore the marriage, but it shouldn't end there. Prayer must also lead the couple to greater intimacy with each other and God.

As in the "most insecure" marriage, children are the biggest victims when this type of marriage doesn't recover. Such children may have some limited exposure to the gospel if the couple still attends church. But they will receive a distorted view of marriage, which in time will affect their own marriage and negatively impact the next generation.

Conclusion and solution

How about your marriage? Based on the above analysis, do you believe there is little hope for your marriage? If your intimacy with God and your spouse is at a low level or completely absent, your marriage may fall into this security matrix box provided at least one of you is praying.

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If your marriage appears to have little hope, don't give up. Prayer can turn things around. Pray specifically that you and your spouse will first recommit to God. This is a place where things are mended. Go back to the basics. Read your Bible. Spend time with your Creator. Pray that God would bring back freshness and love in your marriage.

Then seek renewed intimacy with your spouse. Intimacy with both God and your spouse will reignite your marriage. Above all, don't stop praying. If you are praying, there is hope even if it seems very little hope. If you stop praying, there is truly no hope.

If you are anxious that your marriage could turn into an insecure marriage or a marriage with little hope, then you need to read on and identify exactly where your marriage is right now. Once you identify the security matrix box that describes your marriage, you will know where the deficiency lies and can take the right action to prevent your marriage from becoming like this one.

15. Self-Dependent Marriage

Intimacy with God	X
Intimacy with spouse	✓
Prayer cover for marriage	X

“We will not interfere in each other’s faith,” Jotham and Yvette agreed before getting married. “Nor will we allow religion to be a matter of debate between us.”

Jotham had grown up in a Christian home while Yvette grew up in a non-Christian home. But Jotham was not a serious Christian, attending church only as a religious obligation because of his family background. In contrast, Yvette wasn’t religious at all. She came from a background where she’d had freedom to choose whichever religion she wanted to believe in or stay away from religion completely if she chose.

Soon after their marriage, Yvette chose of her own free will to attend church with Jotham. They have now been married for

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almost two decades and are committed to their marriage. Jotham and Yvette continue to love each other, but beyond that they are also very good friends who enjoy each other's company.

Current state of marriage

This sounds on the surface like a great marriage. Jotham and Yvette are happy together and good friends because the intimacy with spouse pillar is strong. But two other very important pillars—intimacy with God and prayer cover for marriage—are missing.

As the title for this particular security matrix box declares, this is a self-dependent marriage. In other words, a marriage that has self as a foundation rather than God. It is a worldly marriage because God is visibly absent. While nothing seems to be wrong, the Maker and Designer of the institution of marriage has no place in this marriage. Therefore it is definitely at risk. Let's look at each of the firewall pillars and where they stand in such a marriage.

Intimacy with God: There are many marriages where neither spouse has a strong relationship with God. If even one has a strong relationship with God, this in itself can lead to discord as we saw in Sam and Anita's marriage in the last chapter. But in this case, life goes smoothly because neither spouse has God as the centre of their marriage. Such couples don't believe at all in a personal God, or they believe but God isn't a top priority. They may even be Christians who in the past had a dynamic relationship with God but for some reason have drifted away from their faith.

Such couples have a place for God in some corner of their

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lives. They pray or go to church in times of fear and trouble, whether a personal or national tragedy. They show up for special festivals like Christmas, Easter Sunday, or a thanksgiving prayer meeting. But their lack of intimacy with God leaves a gap for the enemy to bring serious harm to the marriage.

Intimacy with spouse: The couples in this category are good examples of a healthy marriage. They love each other, are good friends, and have grown closer to each other over the years. They understand the importance of marriage and have done their best to nurture this relationship. They know each other's love language and understand each other's temperament differences (see section on intimacy with spouse). They give time to each other and take time to fulfil each other's needs. Their communication is at the third and highest level where they share each other's deepest feelings and thoughts.

You will find such couples building good memories by going on vacations together and investing in their marriage relationship. Family is always first, and they don't allow careers and ambitions to come in the way of their marriage. If they face any conflict in their marriage, they work on resolving it so those issues don't affect their marriage.

Prayer cover for marriage: All that said, these couples don't have God as their top priority, so they don't take time to pray for each other or their marriage. In fact, they are doing so well in their marriage that they feel no need to pray even if they believe in prayer to begin with.

Reasons leading to this state

Couples like this who are close to each other, have great marriages, but don't acknowledge God as their supreme authority are not uncommon. One primary reason is that they value each other more than anyone else in their life, including God. They may have grown up in homes where their parents went to church, gave their tithes and offerings, attended special conferences and programs, and faithfully carried out other religious duties, all out of reverence for God. But they never personally accepted Christ as their Lord and Saviour.

Or the couple may have had a strong faith in God in the past, but they've backslidden. They still believe in God, but he isn't part of their daily lives, including the marriage relationship. They no longer attend church, prayer meetings, or other religious activities. Their careers or other priorities have taken the place of God in their lives.

Consequences of this state

On the face of it, such marriages seem perfect examples of a good marriage. What could go wrong? But any relationship where the Designer and Maker of that relationship plays no part can't go the distance it is meant to go. Since God is not part of their lives, such couples will not withstand all temptations of the world and the opposite sex.

For instance, their standards of morality will permit loose living at least in their thought life without ever feeling that they've committed any wrong. The man may feel that pornography is no big deal and a great way to entertain himself with his friends. But in fact, this is something that can seriously affect the couple's sex life and therefore their marriage.

Because prayer is absent in this marriage, it is wide open to attacks of the evil one. Without God's help, no human power

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can withstand the power of our invisible enemy. In consequence, such marriages will never reach their full potential. These couples will not go the length, reach the breadth, or enjoy the depth of a truly fulfilled married life. Their happiness will be limited because the greatest joy and pleasure in marriage only come to those who make God a top priority in their marriage.

Children from such a marriage will be emotionally healthy because they see their parents love each other, but they will be spiritually bankrupt. They will also have a healthy understanding of marriage and look forward to having such a relationship themselves. But because God is not a priority in their home, their standard of morality will suffer. In the absence of a family altar, solid Bible teaching, and godly role models, these children will have minimal exposure to the gospel.

Instead, they will find role models to copy through social media, TV, YouTube, and other worldly sources. For example, they may get into one or more physical relationships before marriage and think this is perfectly all right if they are doing it out of love. This in turn will affect their own future marriage, and the cycle will continue.

Conclusion and solution

How is your marriage? Is it a loving, healthy relationship, but you've given God only a corner space in your lives and no say in the marriage? If so, it is an unsafe marriage, a self-dependent marriage rather than a marriage dependent on God.

Maybe you believe in God and consider yourself committed to God. But does that reflect in your marriage? A marriage where your spouse is first priority and God is next or no priority at all is in danger of enemy attack. You may ask why you should even care if all is fine between you and your spouse.

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But remember that invisible spiritual realm we discussed earlier (Ephesians 6, Daniel 10). Many things in our lives and marriages are happening beyond the human realm, and you will need God's help. If not today, then in the future. You may reach out to God then and discover it is already too late.

Maybe you are fairly sure your marriage isn't self-dependent because God is still first in your marriage. Nor is your marriage insecure or with little hope. But you aren't quite happy with your marriage as it is. Then just keep reading to find out which security matrix box your marriage fits into and where it is headed.

16. Protected Self-Dependent Marriage

Intimacy with God	X
Intimacy with spouse	✓
Prayer cover for marriage	✓

From the outside, Samuel and Merlyn appeared to be a perfect couple. They'd been married for fifteen years and had two children, a boy and a girl. Both spouses were very religious, went to church every Sunday, gave their tithes and offerings, and held a regular family altar every day with their children.

Samuel was a very busy man with a senior position in a financial services company. Merlyn worked at a school. She also loved doing housework, cooking, cleaning, and helping her children with their schoolwork. Since her work wasn't as high-pressured as Samuel's, she was active in church ministry. She also networked in prayer for the church women's group and prayed often with her close-knit friends from church.

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Because of their busy schedules, Samuel and Merlyn were often tired and would sleep late after staying up to watch a favourite TV program. But however late they slept, they never missed the family altar, where they would read a passage from the Bible, pray together as a family, and pray for each other.

That said, they struggled with nurturing their own spiritual life. In the mornings, Merlyn would be busy with cooking breakfast, getting the children ready for school, and packing lunch boxes before she headed to her workplace. Sometimes she would read her Bible in the bus on the way to work. In contrast, Samuel was always in a rush to get to his office and found little time to read the Bible. Sunday sermons were the couple's only real source of spiritual nurture.

To ensure their marriage didn't bear the brunt of their busy schedule, Samuel and Merlyn frequently took short trips and vacations together. They loved each other and were good friends. They took time to grow their relationship, and their children could observe that their parents had a healthy marriage.

"I wish I could spend more time with God reading and meditating on the Bible," Samuel told Merlyn one night while they were praying together. "I can feel that I haven't grown much in the Lord over the past years. I'm really struggling with my anger."

Current state of marriage

While this couple seems to have it all together, there are some serious imperfections that can hurt their marriage. Samuel and Merlyn care about their marriage even though they are busy with jobs and church ministry. They also care for their marriage enough to pray. But they have left one area of their life exposed to the evil one. This is a marriage where their love

Protected Self-Dependent Marriage

for each other has outgrown their love for God. Over the years, they've become numb to spiritual things and are content with going through the religious motions of church attendance and the family altar.

This category of marriages is very similar to the self-dependent marriage we covered in the last chapter except that there is prayer cover for the marriage. These are marriages where both spouses believe in God and in prayer, but they don't have a strong relationship with God. Various other priorities in life have caused a lack of intimacy with God, which is leaving a gap for the enemy to hurt their marriage. Let's look briefly at each of the firewall pillars and what they mean for such marriages.

Intimacy with God: In such marriages, either one or both spouses are not intimate with God. This isn't because they don't believe in a personal God. Nor is it by intent or design that they have stopped growing in their relationship with God. They have reached this point in their lives because of circumstances and lack of prioritisation.

There are many such couples who don't take time to grow their relationship with God. They believe in a personal God and have committed their lives to God, but their busyness with career, ministry, or other significant priorities have replaced their devotion to God. They do feel guilty about this fact and are conscious that they have neglected this discipline in their lives.

Spiritual nourishment in such families happens only through Sunday sermons and church Bible studies. They may take time to attend conferences or special meetings where God's Word is preached. What they lack is personally spending time with God. We don't get solid nutrition from light refreshments served at social activities but from the daily nour-

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ishment of healthy home-cooked meals. In the same way, we don't get spiritual nourishment by just listening to Sunday sermons and special conferences but through daily time spent with God and in God's Word.

Intimacy with spouse: The couples in these marriages love each other, are good friends, and have grown closer to each other over the years. They understand the importance of marriage and have done their best to nurture this relationship. They know each other's love language and understand each other's temperament differences (see section on intimacy with spouse). They give time to each other and take time to fulfil each other's needs. Their communication is at the third and highest level where they share each other's deepest feelings and thoughts.

Such couples are good examples of a healthy marriage. They build good memories by going on vacations together and invest in their marriage relationship. Career and ambitions never come in the way of their marriage. Family is always first and then God. If they face any issues in marriage, they work on resolving these issues either as a couple or by going to a counsellor.

Prayer cover for marriage: These couples believe in God and in prayer. Their dependence on external sources for their spiritual growth has kept them sensitive to their own spiritual deficiencies. They also love each other and trust God to protect their relationship, hence their dependence on prayer. This is one of the biggest differentiators between this category and self-dependent marriages.

Either one or both spouses in such marriages believe

Protected Self-Dependent Marriage

strongly in prayer and spend much time in prayer individually and as a family. They also believe in the importance of marriage and pray frequently for the protection of their marriage from attacks of the evil one. Many such couples have been raised in an environment where prayer was emphasised in their homes.

Prayer has the potential to turn things around for marriages in this category. There is a high probability that these couples will eventually turn to God and make him their priority.

Reasons leading to this state

Marriages in this category reach this state for reasons we've already seen in past chapters. The couple believes in a personal God and are devoted to him, but God is not their first priority. They may have had a dynamic relationship with God in the past, but because of reasons already mentioned such as a demanding career or overly-full schedule, they have backslidden.

These couples love each other and care about their relationship. They are good friends and take time for each other. They believe God is the designer of marriage, so they take time out to pray. But their busy schedules snatch away their time with God, which results in a lack of nurture of their relationship with God. Their ambitions, ministry, and even friendship with each other eclipse their relationship with God. They don't find time to study Scriptures and grow in their knowledge of God. They often feel guilty about this struggle.

Consequences of this state

From the outside, such marriages seem perfect examples of a good marriage where nothing can go wrong. But any relation-

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ship where the Designer and Maker of that relationship plays no part can't go the distance it is meant to go. Having an intimate relationship with God is vital to protecting the marriage from the fiery darts of the evil one. Though prayer and intimacy as a couple are both strong pillars, even one broken pillar can give the enemy a foothold.

Intimacy with God strengthens our character and builds immunity against temptation. However strong and loving the relationship may be between a couple, they can't always be together. Temptations from the opposite sex and temptations from the world, especially through digital entertainment and other media, can only be overcome by those who have the discipline of spending time with God.

For instance, when one spouse has to travel for several days or weeks, there will be temptations that test their character. If the relationship with each other is strong but the relationship with God is weak, this exposes the traveling spouse to temptations that are hard to resist. Prayer cover is an important firewall that helps fight and gain victory. But human nature will often reject God's voice when exposed to strong temptations. Succumbing just once in a weak moment can destroy a lovely, blessed marriage. It is at these times that the pillar of intimacy with God will protect you.

As mentioned earlier, our relationship with God is of prime importance in every area of life if we are to be truly successful by God's standards. Even marriages that seem good will never reach full potential when God is absent. The children of such marriages will be emotionally healthy because they see their parents love each other and pray together. Such families may also place a lot of importance on the family altar to the point of religiosity. But if the children don't witness a godly role model of making God a top priority, God will never be first in their own lives either.

Protected Self-Dependent Marriage

The children will also have a healthy understanding of marriage and look forward to a good relationship of their own. But because God isn't a priority in this home, their standard of morality will suffer. In the absence of good Bible teaching and no godly role models, the children may be negatively influenced by digital entertainment, YouTube, and other social media.

Conclusion and solution

Many Christian couples neglect spending time with their Creator and growing that relationship. Pressures of life, busyness, a lack of priority in spending time with God gradually build up, preventing a true intimacy with God. Very busy people often mention this as a major weakness in their lives. They just aren't able to find time with God. When this continues long-term, your spiritual life gets stunted, and you end up paying a price in your marriage.

If your marriage is somewhere close to this, remember that all is not great just because you have a great marriage and have covered your marriage with prayer. Your closeness to God is not just a very important element of your marriage but of your personal life as well. Your marriage will struggle with a lack of depth because of the shallowness of your relationship with God.

Find out what is getting in the way of your relationship with God. Beyond general busyness, this could be complacency, loving your spouse more than you love God, or simple laziness that is preventing you from nurturing your devotional life.

Having said that, salvaging what is lost in this kind of marriage is a comparatively easy thing to do because we have a God who is compassionate and slow to anger (Psalm 103:8;

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145:8). As you take the first step in disciplining yourself to get back to basics, God will take several steps in restoring what is lost. You will see the refreshing difference this will make to your married life and how God gets the glory that to this point was overshadowed by your own life.

By now you may have a good estimate of where your marriage stands right now. If you're still not sure, keep reading.

17. Singlehood Marriage

Intimacy with God	✓
Intimacy with spouse	X
Prayer cover for marriage	X

One day Kathy picked up her phone and called her pastor. “Pastor, I am calling off my marriage. But before I did that, I wanted to let you know.”

Kathy had been married to Bob for ten years. Both were committed to God and had a passion to serve God in the local church. Both also had very busy careers. As their professional success grew over the years, they found little time to spend with each other.

Bob was an introvert who enjoyed reading the Bible, books on doctrine, and missionary biographies. Kathy was an extrovert who wanted to go out on weekends and travel on vacations. Their busy schedules provided no opportunity to take any real

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break. But Bob always found time to read after work hours and enjoyed himself doing so.

Over the years, Bob and Kathy had been living more as two single people than a couple. Their different work schedules only made things worse. They would spend time individually with God but rarely together. Kathy became bitter and frustrated because she felt her needs weren't being met. She blamed Bob for this.

Current state of marriage

Out of the three firewall pillars, what is missing? You guessed it! Both intimacy with spouse and prayer cover are missing. Bob and Kathy were good Christians who loved God. They spent time nurturing their relationship with God. But when it came to their intimacy with each other, they were at a distance. They also never felt the need to pray for their marriage because their marriage wasn't a priority for either spouse. They may have thought this could go on permanently. But just like a rubber band, it finally snapped when it couldn't stretch any further. Let's take a look at the three firewall pillars of marriage to get some insight as to what went wrong here.

Intimacy with God: Marriages where both husband and wife are committed to God, read the Bible, go to church, and even do church ministry are quite common. You might consider them a couple who is seeking the kingdom of God and his righteousness (Matthew 6:33) and therefore assume nothing can go wrong with their marriage. But seeking God's kingdom includes pursuing a correct understanding of biblical marriage and doing all God intended a husband and wife to do.

Many fulltime Christian workers, ministers, pastors, and

Singlehood Marriage

missionaries have fallen into this trap, including quite famous church and ministry leaders. These people have an unwavering loyalty to God and are committed to God's work. They often live sacrificial lives, working hard to serve God's church and reach the lost for God's kingdom.

Few people could match all that World Vision founder Bob Pierce accomplished for God's kingdom, including his fervour, commitment, and the sacrifices he made. He loved God and the ministry to which God called him. But his life ended tragically because of a lopsided intimacy with God but not with his family.

Bob Pierce travelled up to ten months a year in ministry, so his wife and daughters rarely saw him. His eldest daughter committed suicide, and he eventually separated from his wife, though they never divorced. In her biography of her father, *Man of Vision*, Bob's second daughter Marilee Pierce Dunker writes about his love for God, ministry, and the sacrifices he made even at the cost of his own family. She also writes about the deal he claimed to have made with God in placing the needs of the world above any needs of his own family:

I've made an agreement with God that I'll take care of His helpless little lambs overseas if He'll take care of mine at home.

The problem with this deal is that it wasn't one God ever asked of his servants. As we saw earlier, intimacy with God is not enough to sustain marriage. Nor did God intend to satisfy needs that only a spouse can meet.

Intimacy with spouse: In pursuit of spiritual things, either one or both spouses can become blind to the obvious marital responsibilities and needs. Marriage cannot go too far without the active engagement and involvement of both husband and wife. When God first created Adam, he said:

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It's not good for the Man to be alone; I'll make him a helper, a companion. (Genesis 2:18, The Message)

God went on to create Eve as Adam's wife so that Adam wouldn't be alone. Companionship is the essence of marriage. Every marriage is conceptually an expression of this divine plan. So if the couple does everything else but doesn't fulfil God's plan of companionship, how will they ever have a true marriage?

Many such couples will be on a high of joy and excitement initially as they pour themselves into ministry upon ministry. If the couple is talented and called, they will naturally be drawn to help others in church or community. They may even agree mutually to spend little time with each other in order to do more ministry outside the home. But marriage was never intended for a couple to serve outside the home by neglecting the inside of the home. Such a marriage can't go on for too long because it is clearly a violation of God's laws for marriage.

Just as breaking physical laws like the law of gravity harms the person breaking it, those who break God's laws for marriage will cause harm to themselves and their marriage. Let's be reminded once again of God's admonition on marriage that is repeated five different times in the Bible.

Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. (Genesis 2:24, NKJV).

Becoming one flesh as a couple requires intentional effort. That will only come about as you grow in intimacy with your spouse. In singlehood marriages, the basics of marriage are neglected. Communication may reach the first or second level but rarely the third level where spouses share their deepest

Singlehood Marriage

thoughts and feelings. Where do these couples even have time to share deep feelings?

There will be more criticism and less appreciation in such marriages as well. Practice of love languages (see section on intimacy with spouse) will also be missing because the couple have never really come to know each other. Ironically, they may know more about what is happening in other homes and families to whom they minister than their own home or family.

Prayer cover for marriage: Prayer is not absent in these homes. Such couples will maintain a regular family altar. They pray for ministry, job, church members, friends, relatives, neighbours, everyone and everything but their own marriage. We pray for those things we consider to be important. When marriage isn't a priority and couples don't have time for each other, they often don't pray for each other or their marriage. They simply assume subconsciously that the marriage is going well and take it for granted.

Praying specifically for the blessings of marriage is missed by these couples. Sadly, the very thing that is much needed in such marriages is missing. A marriage that is not covered by prayer lacks protection and is open to the attack of the enemy.

Reasons leading to this state

Marriages can reach this state for several reasons. One major reason is a misunderstanding that because God should be our top priority, we must therefore sacrifice all other important things in life, including our marriage and family. If both spouses are occupied with ministry or something else that is morally good from the start of their marriage, the early euphoria and other emotions may sustain their relationship for a while,

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and they may not recognize the gradual collapse of their marriage.

Another common cause for spouses becoming distant from each other is the birth of their children. Children are a blessing, and their arrival brings joy to both the father and mother. But if the couple is ignorant of biblical principles for building a healthy family, the added pressure and time involved in child-rearing can push a couple apart. We will discuss this issue in detail in the last section of this book.

Anything in life that we consider to be a priority needs time and effort to nurture. Without that nurture, we may not even realise it's falling apart. If even one spouse considers the marriage a high priority, that spouse can alert the other about the growing gap. Sadly, when both spouses are overly busy, there is no one within the home to raise that warning. It will take a marriage seminar, sermon, or some other external instruction to remind us. If the couple is too busy to even attend such seminars or listen to teaching, then the marriage will continue on a downward spiral.

Time is a crucial factor in nurturing a relationship. If the marriage relationship isn't considered important and every other part of life is given a higher priority, little time will be dedicated to pursuing intimacy with one's spouse, and the marriage will likely not be remembered in prayer.

The good factors in this category of marriage is that both spouses are consciously making God a priority. Even if they spend little time with each other, they are spending time with God. Such marriages may continue for many years until one spouse or both finally take the initiative to either restore closeness in the marriage or break up.

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Consequences of this state

There is no doubt that this is a very insecure relationship. Two of the three firewall pillars have been removed long ago. The marriage is in a tight spot where either or both spouses may find themselves sexually tempted because their needs aren't met. They don't even have the spiritual protection God would give if they prayed for their marriage and spouse.

Because the couple does have a growing relationship with God, this provides some protection. The couple may also be under the impression that because of their intimacy with God, they don't have to worry about giving into temptation. But all it takes is the wrong day and wrong time, and the enemy of our marriage can orchestrate circumstances to catch us by surprise. Remember that a marriage which leaves the gate wide open by losing its firewall pillars is a soft target for the enemy to fire his ammunition.

When Billy married Kate, both spouses loved God and were mature in their faith. Billy was a busy and famous pastor who was popular not just with his own congregation but other churches where he went to preach. He often travelled for ministry crusades that lasted a week. Kate was also busy in church ministry among the women.

During one crusade, he would take a break each day to rest at a church member's home near the venue. The man of the house held a very busy senior position with a corporation, so he wasn't home during these rest periods. A homemaker, his wife was left alone in the house to entertain Billy. As they talked, they became increasingly attracted to each other. Even after the crusade was over, Billy continued to visit this woman. Eventually, both fell into an adulterous relationship.

Though this incident happened more than two decades ago, it made an indelible mark on my own life. It is a reminder of the dangers of not staying close to my spouse. However

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strong we may consider ourselves in the faith, God never meant us to be separated long-term from our spouse.

Even if the couple doesn't fall into an immoral act or relationship, the marriage loses its essence. Even if the pursuits in which they are involved are godly ones, they have become virtually single in how they live their lives. They have friends outside the home but live like strangers in the home. Since they haven't taken time to learn each other's love language or communicate at deeper levels, they live like roommates.

If they have children, they may get distracted in bringing up their children and launching them successfully in life. But once the children have left home for college or to get married, the couple will reach a new low of empty nest syndrome. By then, the damage caused early in marriage by this singlehood mentality will have sealed the fate of their marriage.

As to the children from such marriages, they will receive plenty of spiritual feeding that will be helpful in life. They will hear the gospel and, in all likelihood, believe in the Lord Jesus. But they are also observing a damaged marriage that will become a model for their own marriage. These children may turn out to be godly church members and ministry leaders who serve their church and community. But they may also unwittingly neglect their own spouses. The next generation is, after all, in many ways a product of the previous generation.

Conclusion and solution

If your marriage is anything like the above, you will be able to determine this easily. You most likely will not have loving feelings towards your spouse. In fact, you very likely have only critical thoughts about your spouse or are completely indifferent. You may feel no motivation to pray for your marriage. And you are satisfied to continue in this state for the rest of your life

Singlehood Marriage

because you have so many exciting things you love to do to keep you busy.

If you think this may be describing your marriage, then the first thing you need to do right now is to pray to God. Pray that God would protect your marriage. Pray that at the first opportunity you will begin rebuilding your marriage. Seek to discover why your marriage isn't a priority in your life. What else has taken its place? Is it your job, ministry, or a hobby, friends, entertainment, or social media.

If your marriage isn't quite in this state, then keep on reading so you can discover where it is at this moment and take the necessary action that will help you build and grow your marriage.

18. Protected Singlehood Marriage

Intimacy with God	✓
Intimacy with spouse	X
Prayer cover for marriage	✓

“Oh, yes, Joseph has a great ministry, but he doesn’t have time for me and our sons,” Rachel told the young couple she was chatting with at the supermarket. “You are both young, so spend time with each other. Your marriage is more important than ministry.”

Joseph and Rachel had been married for twenty years and had two teenage boys. Joseph was very successful in his career, a church elder, and also had a flourishing teaching and preaching ministry in the church. Joseph and Rachel were a well-respected family in church and ministry circles, and most

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people who knew them counted it an honour to be associated with them.

One day Rachel ran into a young church family while shopping. The couple were eager to tell Rachel how much they appreciated Joseph's ministry. As Rachel listened, her smile turned into a frown. The young couple were shocked in turn to hear what Rachel had to say about a ministry leader they respected so highly.

Joseph and Rachel were both committed Christians who loved God. They had regular times of family devotions and prayer for various things, including their marriage and family. But Rachel was hurt that Joseph was so busy serving others in his job and church ministry that he never had time to serve his wife and children or nurture their relationship.

Current state of marriage

This is a marriage where just one of the firewall pillars is missing. You have likely already guessed that pillar is the intimacy with spouse pillar. In such marriages, both spouses are strong in their faith, love God, attend church, read their Bibles, and spend time in prayer. The biggest challenge for these couples is finding time and prioritising marriage. This is in many ways similar to the previous category of singlehood marriage except that this couple recognises the importance of marriage and therefore pray for their marriage. Hence, I call this category protected singlehood marriage. Let's take a brief look at the three pillars in these marriages.

Intimacy with God: Such marriages are common in many spiritually-inclined homes where the couple loves God and is growing in their intimacy with God. They value the institution

Protected Singlehood Marriage

of marriage because it's God's creation. They even encourage people to obey God and embrace the institution of marriage. They assume the marriage will grow and develop naturally because they have such a dynamic relationship with God. But just as with the singlehood marriage, intimacy with God is not enough.

Intimacy with spouse: Intimacy with God is often misunderstood as intimacy with spouse. In such marriages, it is typically either ministry or career or both that takes precedence over the marriage. No intentional efforts are made to fulfil the marital vows or develop the relationship. Rather, there is a misunderstanding that because the couple is focused on God and ministry, God will automatically take care of the marriage and all will be well. But taking time for one's spouse is a must if the marriage is to grow and fulfil God's purposes. These families face similar challenges as the singlehood marriage.

Prayer cover for marriage: While in many ways these marriages are similar to singlehood marriage, the one differentiator is the pillar of prayer cover. One reason may be that these couples realised at some point the importance of marriage. They may have attended a marriage seminar or conference or listened to a podcast that motivated them to begin praying for their marriage.

Edward, who had pastored a local congregation for thirty years, attended a marriage enrichment meeting with his wife Sarita. During the testimony time, he spoke up honestly about what he felt. "I have never in my married life of twenty-five years heard any teaching like this on marriage. I am guilty of neglecting my marriage. I confess to my wife today that I have

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been a bad husband and promise to give more time to my spouse.”

Sarita was moved to tears by his humble confession. Couples like Edward and Sarita are godly couples who love the Lord and recognize the importance of marriage but for various reasons haven’t nurtured their own marriage relationship. In many cases, the spouse who is less busy is often the one praying for their marriage and encouraging their spouse to attend marriage seminars and conferences. When they do so and respond, transformation takes place.

Either one or both spouses in such marriages strongly believe in prayer and spend much time in individual and family prayers. More often than not, the husbands are teachers of God’s Word in church leadership positions who preach on prayer and believe prayer works. They believe marriage is important and they do pray to cover their marriages from the attack of the enemy.

Reasons leading to this state

Maybe you are wondering how a couple can love the Lord, have an important place for God in their lives, pray for many things including marriage, yet have a marriage where there is no intimacy with the spouse. Sadly, it can happen. I have seen many marriages like this where either one or both spouses are busy in their careers and church ministry. Because most of their time is occupied in doing good things that seem justifiably important, it never dawns on them that there is anything wrong with what they are doing.

In these marriages, there is typically a feeling that all is well, including the marriage. This is a deception from the evil one. Marriage is meaningless in one sense without intimacy between husband and wife. A primary reason why this

Protected Singlehood Marriage

happens in such marriages is because other things become a far greater priority than the marriage or spouse, including things done for God, church, and in service of others.

Consequences of this state

We've already seen in earlier chapters that if even one fire-wall pillar is missing from the marriage, this can be sign of danger. In this category of marriage, just one pillar is missing—intimacy with spouse. Both spouses are not close to each other and don't have time for each other, which means the needs only a husband and wife can meet are not being met. Sexual needs, emotional needs, communication, sharing, and quality time are all missing in these marriages.

These are all needs that can be met outside the marriage. The danger if they aren't met at home is that spouses will seek to have those needs met elsewhere. Some emotional needs and communication can be met by close friends or distraction through hobbies. But specific legitimate needs like sexual needs can't be met outside the marriage relationship without disobeying God's commandments for marriage.

There are some positive things about this category of marriage. First, the couple's intimacy with God will help them resist temptation to a great extent. They are also so occupied they may not feel a strong urge to satisfy certain needs. Second, because they have committed their marriage to God in prayer, they have spiritual protection from God. Such marriages will never separate and may eventually be restored because prayer makes the difference, unlike singlehood marriage in the last chapter, where the couple don't pray for their marriage.

The children of these couples will grow up in a godly environment and may place their faith in Jesus early in life because they witness their parents giving top priority to a relationship

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with God. But when it comes to marriage, they will have an unbiblical picture of marriage. Unfortunately, because God is the central figure in these homes, and the children are experiencing a family altar, prayer, and other spiritual things, they may not think anything is really wrong with this picture of marriage. Later in their own marriages, they may end up imitating their parents unless they are taught the correct way to grow a godly marriage.

Conclusion and solution

If your marriage is anything like the above description, you should take immediate steps to protect your marriage. Keep in mind that God should be our top priority, and things done for him in service are important. But only your relationship with God should come ahead of your marriage relationship. Your career and church ministry should both come below your relationship with your spouse in the order of priority.

It's not enough just to give lip service to this sacred relationship called marriage. You must make it a high priority. Service to your spouse is very important service. God has joined you with your spouse to serve one another, meet each other's needs, and thereby fulfil God's divine purposes and bring glory to his name. A good marriage is one of the best things that can happen to any human being because it is God's design that he planned for human beings from the beginning

19. Self-Confident Marriage

Intimacy with God	✓
Intimacy with spouse	✓
Prayer cover for marriage	X

“Lack of prayer resulted in so many conflicts,” Marianne shared about her early married life. “My husband and I were weak in this area. We had good quiet times with the Lord. We also spent plenty of time with each other in building up our marriage. But we didn’t consciously make much effort to pray over our marriage, and we’ve seen the consequences. We didn’t understand why so many conflicts erupted from nowhere.”

Marianne had been married to Diego for thirty-five years with two grown up children. They were both serving in full-time ministry with a Christian organization. They’d undergone pre-marital counselling, and their relationship was steady during their early years of their marriage due to their spiritual

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maturity. They loved God and spent much time reading the Bible and interceding in prayer for others. But they never felt they should be praying for their own marriage until the day they realised they were consistently experiencing some irrational interpersonal conflicts.

Current state of marriage

As my wife and I have conducted marriage seminars and interviewed other couples, we've discovered that prayer is often a neglected area of marriage. These couples are intimate with God and with each other. They are emotionally, spiritually, and socially mature. They serve in ministry and within their community. They are well respected. Yet many of these couples confess that praying specifically for their marriage has never occurred to them. Unbelievable, yet true.

Let's look closely at this category of marriage in correlation to the three firewall pillars. These marriages are doing well overall, but one of the three pillars is missing.

Intimacy with God: Most spiritually mature Christian couples love God and God's Word. They spend time daily reading, studying, and meditating on Scripture. Such couples believe God is the designer of marriage, so the institution of marriage must be honoured. They are committed to their marriage, display strong character, and have overcome temptations from the opposite sex. Even if they experience conflicts, they've learned to honour each other and find ways to overcome their conflicts.

Most such couples have strong self-discipline, are well respected, and have great credibility. They are excellent role models for single people and younger couples because of their

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knowledge and godly lives. They are very involved in their local churches if not in fulltime ministry. These couples put God first without any compromise. Because they are so strong in this particular pillar, they think nothing can really go wrong in their marriage.

Intimacy with spouse: Happy marriages are those where each spouse makes an effort to build their relationship. They love each other, care for each other's well-being, know each other's love language, and fill their spouse's emotional tank regularly (see section on intimacy with spouse). You will see all these qualities in this category of marriage. In such marriages, each spouse takes time to compassionately meet each other's needs.

Their communication will be at the third and highest level of sharing each other's deepest thoughts and feelings (see section on intimacy with spouse). Over the years, they have become good friends and companions. These marriages work as a team toward a common goal in all aspects of their life. If both have jobs outside the home, they are supportive of each other's career. If only the husband has a career, the wife is a great supporter of his career. They are interested in each other's personal development and encourage each other to grow as mature individuals.

Both spouses cherish their relationship and are good examples of a healthy marriage. Such couples build good memories by going on vacations together and investing in their relationship. Career and ambitions never come in the way of their marriage. Family holds highest priority after God. This pillar of intimacy with spouse is strong, so they are self-confident about their marriage.

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Prayer cover for marriage: Prayer is not absent in these homes. Such families implement a regular family altar, which includes praying for their children, finances, ministry, job, church members, friends, relatives, and others. In short, everything but their marriage. Because they are so self-confident about their relationship, they may be subconsciously deceived into thinking nothing can go wrong or that they don't need to pray specifically for their marriage.

But as mentioned earlier, we are constantly under an invisible attack by the evil one. Christians who have achieved success in any area of life because of superior skills or proficiency have a tendency to become overconfident. When this happens, they may stop praying and depending on God. This gives opportunity to the enemy of our marriages to interfere. However close we may be to God and to our spouse, prayer should never become optional in our lives.

Prayer is a powerful firewall that is often underestimated. It is through prayer that we can resist the devil's attacks on our marriage (James 4:7; 1 Peter 5:8-9). If your marriage is doing well and nothing seems to be going seriously wrong, think about it again. Are you covering your marriage with prayer? The apostle Paul ends his description of spiritual armour with a call to constant prayer (Ephesians 6:10-20). Prayer is the armour of armours. So continue to pray for your marriage, not because your marriage is having problems but because you don't want unnecessary problems in marriage. Intimacy with God and spouse are very strong pillars but not praying for your marriage leaves a gap for the evil one to attack the marriage even when everything seems okay.

Reasons leading to this state

Self-Confident Marriage

One common reason for this neglect that emerged from interviews with mature Christian couples was that they simply didn't realize they needed to pray specifically for their marriage. Prayer is a typical response to adverse situations that feel beyond our control. In a good marriage where two mature individuals love each other and have nurtured their relationship, the couple feels safe and protected. Their godly character leads them to pray about global conflicts, suffering, corruption, sickness, and other areas of need, but praying for an already good marriage just doesn't seem necessary.

But in fact it is very necessary. We might think of praying for a good marriage as proactive or preventive praying. Just as many people take vitamins and other supplements to proactively prevent harm to the body, we should be taking preventive steps to protect our marriages rather than waiting until harm comes and trying to fix the marriage after the fact. For some couples, a lack of prayer for their marriage may also be due to lack of time, laziness, or overconfidence.

Consequences of this state

The two pillars of intimacy with God and each other give strong protection to the marriage. Especially when spouses are both spiritually mature individuals of good character who love and care for each other. Rarely will such a couple come under fire concerning their marriage. So what can go wrong, and does prayer really help?

On the surface, it may seem that things can't go wrong, but don't forget that unseen spiritual world. Paul asked the church at Ephesus and Colossae to pray for him so that he might boldly and clearly share the gospel (Ephesians 6:19-20; Colossians 4:2-4). If he felt the need to ask for prayer in an area where he

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was expert, then we shouldn't hesitate to pray and ask for prayer over something we're good at, including marriage.

If nothing else, the evil one can take advantage of a lack of prayer to prevent a marriage from living up to the full potential God designed it to be. Even in a good marriage, who knows how much better it could have been and how many more lives may have been blessed if covered by prayer. Also, even spiritually mature individuals who love their spouses can have weak moments. The evil one is always on the lookout for such opportunities. Prayer is a proactive measure against any such attacks.

In such families, the next generation is truly blessed because the children have godly role models who love the Lord, live exemplary lives, and are disciplined in many areas of their lives. The children also see a loving marriage and subconsciously desire a marriage like their parents. They are exposed to much prayer because the family altar is not an optional thing in these homes. They grow up in a healthy environment where they will develop personal relationship with God.

That said, the children may occasionally witness conflicts over trivial matters. They may wonder why these happen unless they are taught about spiritual warfare and the need for prayer specifically for marriage.

Conclusion and solution

If you have a great marriage but haven't taken time to pray specifically for your marriage, then may I challenge you to reconsider this glorious privilege and responsibility and begin praying consciously for this wonderful institution called marriage where God can be much glorified. Prayer protects the marriage from any harm the evil one can bring as much as prayer protects us from physical danger or gives us success in evangelism or helps us in our exams or to recover from financial

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debt. There is a part we play. But there is also a part God plays as we pray. God answers prayer.

In marriage, we do our part by growing in the Lord and growing in our relationship with our spouse. Prayer is God vouching for us that he will go to any lengths to protect the marriage. This will lead to an enriched, abundant marriage.

20. Most Secure Marriage

Intimacy with God	✓
Intimacy with spouse	✓
Prayer cover for marriage	✓

After twenty years of marriage, Joshua and Jane enjoy a secure, loving relationship and today are helping other couples on the verge of divorce. But in their early years of marriage, all did not go well. In fact, they almost ended up getting a divorce.

Joshua and Jane met at a youth meeting. After much prayer and help from church elders, they decided to get married. To prepare themselves, they went for pre-marital counselling and read various good books on marriage. Both spent much time reading and learning from the Scriptures, and they would challenge each other to read the Bible daily. They loved each other dearly and sincerely applied in their marriage everything they'd learned in their pre-marital counselling.

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One day Jane asked Joshua, “Do you love anyone else?”

“What?” Joshua jumped up from his chair. “Who else would I love but you?”

Joshua thought Jane’s strange question was a one-time incident, but her doubts as to his love only escalated. When she expressed such doubts, Joshua grew incensed and shouted at her, demanding to know why she was doubting him. He loved God, and Jane knew that. But she felt helpless, and their fights created a very unhappy atmosphere in the home.

They eventually visited a marriage counsellor. They came to realize that Jane’s constant doubts was the result of her insecure past. On his part, Joshua had grown up in a home where alcohol was abused, which led to a generational pattern of angry outbursts. Counselling brought some temporary relief, but Jane’s doubts and Joshua’s infuriated shouting continued.

One day when they were fighting, Joshua told Jane, “I want a divorce from you, or I want to die. I can’t live in this marriage any longer.”

Jane was heartbroken. She began fasting and praying specifically for her weakness and that God would save their marriage. One day, she asked Joshua, “Would you please consider joining me in prayer and fasting once a week?”

Joshua agreed immediately. He loved Jane and didn’t want to lose her. They both loved God and knew marriage was God’s divine plan while separation was neither a solution nor honouring to God. Together, they began praying for God to protect their marriage and help them to find a way out from the challenges caused by their emotional baggage.

Things began changing. Joshua learned that quality time was Jane’s love language (see section on intimacy with spouse). He started spending quality time with her, listening to her, and showing empathy to her emotions. This helped Jane feel more secure about their relationship. In turn, Jane came to under-

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stand that Joshua was sensitive to loud noise and fighting. She became more careful about this when they talked. They had soon bonded even closer than when they were first married.

Joshua and Jane have now been happily married for more than two decades. They recognize the importance of growing in their relationship with God and with each other. Prayer rescued them, so they also understand the importance of prayer in their marriage. Even though their past emotional baggage is no longer a major issue, they continue to pray fervently for the protection of their marriage. They pray for each other's needs, career, and ministry. They also counsel other couples about the importance of prayer in marriage.

Current state of marriage

All three pillars that enrich and protect a marriage can be seen in this final category of marriage. These couples are growing in their intimacy with God, love each other, and consistently, persistently pray for their marriage. Here is a fool-proof marriage with a solid firewall that nothing can infiltrate. Let's take a look at how each of the three pillars apply to these marriages.

Intimacy with God: These couples recognize the importance of God in their lives and are committed to the institution of marriage. Both husband and wife are born-again Christians who have surrendered their lives to Jesus. They are mature, wise, and godly. They prioritise their time with God, and God is number one in their lives. They don't want to compromise ever in this area of their life.

These couples also love God and his Word. They spend time daily reading, studying, and meditating on Scripture.

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They believe God designed and established the institution of marriage, which must be honoured. They are committed to their marriage. These couples have strong character and strive daily to overcome any temptations from the opposite sex.

A lot of giving to each other is a sign of agape love in these marriages. The husband prioritises his wife and gives his time sacrificially to her despite his busy schedule. The wife prioritises her husband and meets all his needs without expecting anything. The focus for both is to love their spouse as God loves them. Nothing in their lives is concealed from the other spouse because they communicate and hold each other accountable.

Forgiveness is immediate in these marriages. They keep short accounts and don't carry forward one day's hurts to the next day so that they don't leave any foothold for the devil (Ephesians 4:26-27). There is no room for bitterness in these marriages. Instead, they are constantly learning to resolve conflicts and reduce friction. Humility, meekness, and patience—the qualities that maintain unity (Ephesians 4:2-3)—are evident in these marriages. Pride is constantly eliminated, and couples bear with each other. These couples don't expect their spouses to meet every need because they accept that their spouse is human and there are needs only God can meet.

Such couples have strong self-discipline, are well respected, and have great credibility. They are excellent role models for single people and younger couples because of their knowledge and godly lives. They are very involved in their local churches if not in fulltime ministry. These couples put God first without any compromise.

Intimacy with spouse: In such marriages, both spouses are great companions and complement each other. They have common goals and support each other in their vocations and

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other pursuits. They don't live two separate lives but lives that are intertwined with each other.

Happy marriages are those where each spouse makes an effort to build this relationship. They love each other, respect each other, care for each other's well-being, know each other's love language, and take time to regularly fill their spouse's emotional tank. You will see all these qualities in this category of marriage. In such marriages, sexual intimacy is not just something the man enjoys but both spouses look forward to these intimate moments because this brings them closer to each other.

Their communication will be at the third and highest level where they share each other's deepest thoughts and feelings (see section on intimacy with spouse). Over the years, they have become good friends and companions. If they have conflicts in financial matters, parenting style, or other issues, they have learned to honour each other and find ways to overcome their conflicts. They are aware of past emotional baggage so are sensitive to each other. This is truly a marriage where leaving parents and cleaving to each other as a married couple has become a reality just as God intended it to be. They are interested in each other's personal development and encourage each other to grow as mature individuals.

Both spouses cherish their relationship and are good examples of a healthy marriage. Such couples build good memories by going on vacations together and investing in their relationship. Career and ambitions never come in the way of their marriage. Family holds highest priority after God. Their intimacy with God influences their intimacy with each other, creating a strong firewall to protect their marriage.

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Prayer cover: Prayer is of high importance in such marriages. Just because all is well doesn't mean all *will* be well. Proactive prayer helps these couples fight the unseen battle on a daily basis. They take time to pray for each other and for their marriage to reach greater heights that God has in store for them. As mentioned in the chapter on prayer coverage for marriage, these couples pray for each other's weaknesses and devotional life. They pray for the protection of their marriage and are sensitive to attacks from the evil one. They wear their spiritual armour against day of evil (Ephesians 6:13).

Prayer is not optional in these marriages. These couples pray without ceasing for many different aspects of their life, including intercession for others. But praying for their spouses and marriage is of high importance. They see so much transformation and victory in their marriage that they share the importance of prayer with others. But they are not overconfident because of their intimacy with God and with each other. Nor do they credit themselves for their successful marriage because they know that success is dependent on remaining faithful in prayer.

Reasons leading to this state

Many such couples have gone through challenges in their marriage and even crisis to the point of separation. They have realised their own frailty and inadequacy. Their dependence on God and intimacy with him is a result of recognizing these shortcomings. In the above example of Joshua and Jane, their past was what caused conflict in their present until they found a solution in God and prayer. Over a period of time, couples in this category of marriage recognize the importance of God in their lives for everything, including marriage.

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Other couples may have intimacy with God, but lack of knowledge or fulfilling their marital duties lead to a crisis in their marriage. In the chapter on singlehood marriage, for example, Bob and Kathy were both good Christians but didn't meet each other's needs. Once such couples understand the importance of growing in intimacy with each other, they can begin to rebuild their marriage. They will know a good marriage isn't something that happens naturally but needs care, nurture, time, and much effort.

Other couples may feel all is going well in their marriage but wonder why petty things sometimes become so big. As they grow in their faith, these couples will recognize that the spiritual world interferes with our physical world. As they become sensitive to this area, they realise you can't do anything without prayer and that for a victorious future, prayer is essential, not optional.

Consequences of this state

This category of marriage is the most secure. When a husband and wife are intimate with God, intimate with each other, and pray for victory in their marriage, there is nothing that can breach this union. A completely secure marriage is like an expensive car that is well-maintained. It works smoothly, reaches its full potential, and those riding inside enjoy the ride.

These couples enjoy the height, breadth, and depth of marriage God intended in his original design for marriage. It breaks God's heart to see separation or abuse in marriage. In contrast, what great joy for our Creator when he sees his design doing exactly what he meant it to be. A truly fulfilled marriage pleases God and brings glory to him.

Good marriages are the bedrock of a society. Good family

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relationships positively impact the home, neighbourhood, church, workplace, government, and society at large. Good marriages give hope to other marriages that are on the rock. To those wishing to be married, they radiate a positivity about marriage. Children from such marriages receive a solid foundation of God and the Scriptures. They have a positive perception of marriage because of what they see in their parents. Such children become dependent on God in prayer early in life and understand the invisible spiritual dimensions that can interfere with our well-being.

Conclusion and solution

All married couples should strive to reach this state in their marriage. Only then will they reach the full potential of marriage God intends for them. True fulfilment of marriage comes when you are completely secure and protected in your marriage just as a computer that is full protected by its firewall's functions to the full potential its designer intended. Such godly marriages make an impact on their generation and the generations to come.

The first book of the Bible gives us the account of a perfect married couple until sin entered their marriage (Genesis 3). The last book of the Bible ends with what will be the perfect joyous, fulfilled marriage between the perfect couple—Christ, the Bridegroom, and his Bride, the Church (2 Corinthians 11:2; Ephesians 5:25-32; Revelation 19:7-9; 21:1-2, 9).

What about your marriage? Where does it fit into the security matrix box? Is your marriage most secure? If not, let this be your goal. Read the chapters on intimacy with God, intimacy with spouse, and prayer cover for marriage. Find out where you are still lacking. What are the issues of the heart you still need

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to overcome? What areas of marriage are you still struggling with and why? Do you need to kickstart your prayer life? As you focus on each of the three pillars, you will discover where you lack and what you can do to overcome this deficiency.

Mark and Sharon

“That was wonderful!” Sharon exclaimed. “How many security matrix boxes did you say, Mark? Six? Seven? Did I miss any?”

“There were eight in all,” Mark reminded her.

“Well, I wonder which matrix box would best describe our marriage,” Sharon said thoughtfully.

Mark looked down at her, his expression serious. “Which do you think it is?”

“I want to believe our marriage fits into the most secure marriage category,” Sharon responded. “After all, we both spend time daily with God. We read God’s Word and meditate on it. We do our best to obey him in all we do, don’t we?”

“I agree,” said Mark. “It wasn’t so with me earlier in marriage. But you nudged me many times to have my quiet time, and that has paid off. Thanks for that! We also love each other and are close to each other, wouldn’t you say?”

“Absolutely!” Sharon replied. “We are intimate with God and each other. I am so grateful to you for not giving up on me. And we also pray regularly.”

“Thanks to you for that. I would have never taken that initiative.” Mark’s eyebrows knit together thoughtfully. “I think you are right, Sharon. We are in the most secure marriage box. But we cannot take that for granted. We need to keep strengthening these pillars all of our life.”

“I agree,” Sharon concurred. “And now that we have a

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strong firewall, nothing and no one, including the devil, can intrude in our marriage.”

“Yes, we are safe for the rest of our life so long as we maintain those pillars. Let’s thank God for his grace by which we have a safe and secure marriage.” Mark took Sharon’s hand in his. Closing their eyes, they prayed together.

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Questions For Discussion

1. Out of the eight security matrix boxes we have discussed, which box best describes your marriage?
2. If your marriage fits into one of the first seven boxes, then either one, two, or all three pillars are weak or missing altogether. Identify to the best of your ability which pillar or pillars is weak for either you, your spouse, or both of you.
3. What steps are you willing to take to strengthen the weak/missing pillar or pillars?

Section Four:

APPLYING THE SOLUTION

In the previous three sections, we have focused on identifying the problem, establishing the solution, and assessing the risk. In this fourth section, we will cover four different ages and stages of marriage and apply practically the solutions given in section two to each of the four stages.

21. The New Two

As children go through ages and stages over their lifetime, so do marriages. Each stage has its unique ups and downs, and each marriage may go through different security matrix boxes* over a lifetime. The goal of the following chapters is to examine the various ages and stages of marriage and how to move from an undesired security matrix box to one that is honouring to God. Since your marriage is definitely in one of the following four stages as well as one of the eight security matrix boxes, you should be able to relate and deep-dive into your own marriage.

The New Two (Sowing time)	Two become Three (Sowing time)	Mid-Life Surprise (Reaping time)	Last Lap, Last Chance (Reaping time)
Newly-married, twenties to early thirties.	Children/family responsibilities, thirties to forties.	Forties to late fifties.	Sixties and beyond.

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* In the next four chapters, we will be often referring to the security matrix box we discussed in the previous section. If you are finding it difficult to keep track of the various categories, it is recommended you keep a copy of the matrix box in front of you or simply use a bookmark to keep at your fingertips the matrix box provided in section three.

Early excitement

“Just one more day,” Jason reminded his fiancée Jasmine over the phone. They’d been engaged for six months and couldn’t wait to get married.

Every couple looks forward to this first phase with great expectations. I remember how excited my wife and I were to get married. In this phase, couples experience extremes of emotions. Feelings of love are strong, and the joy and excitement are incomparable. Whether the couple has dated for some time or the marriage was arranged as happens in some cultures, the experience is still new and unparalleled by any other relationship. Beginning with the honeymoon, the marriage moves to the routine of getting back to work, sharing responsibilities in the home, feeling loved and giving love, going out on weekends, enjoying sexual bliss, talking and listening to each other.

Then the first argument takes place. While such conflicts are common in marriage, they can spiral into bitter fights that have the potential to destroy the marriage. This is when the three security pillars we discussed earlier come into play. If the husband and wife are growing in their intimacy with God, determined to grow in intimacy with each other, and take time out to pray for the marriage, this will make a world of difference to their long-term relationship.

At this stage of marriage, most couples have dreams of

The New Two

making it big in life. They may have taken out a new car loan or house mortgage. Job security is a big deal, and couples often don't have a huge bank balance because of wedding expenses and the cost of setting up a new home. Career is a high priority and can be the biggest threat to marriage if not managed prudently.

Surprisingly, another big threat for marriage can be church and ministry responsibilities. This is a subtle danger because couples believe what they are doing is for God and God's kingdom so they don't anticipate risk to their marriage. That's a misunderstanding. Great men and women of God have fallen to temptations from the opposite sex because they neglected their own home in the pursuit of building other lives.

Shifting security matrix boxes

Initially in marriage, a couple may find themselves in the most secure marriage matrix box (see section on security lapses in marriage) because they have a lot of love for each other, dependence on God, and prayer. The initial euphoria and excitement of marriage provides a safety net. There is also a sense of security because everything looks fine.

But this shouldn't be taken for granted. The couple needs to take time to keep their focus on building their relationship with God and each other, both of which are higher in priority than their careers. Without this, it is easy to slip from a most secure marriage matrix box into other boxes that gradually make the marriage insecure and expose it to harm from the evil one.

For example, when a couple is busy building careers, the time crunch may keep them from spending time with God, which will eventually affect their spiritual life. This may shift

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their state to a protected self-dependent marriage where the couple loves each other and prays for their marriage but aren't close to God. Lack of spiritual growth affects integrity and character, so this couple may find themselves willing to compromise in their thought life and other moral issues. This leads to temptation and eventually even losing their battle with lust.

Shama was not working when she married Michael, so she spent meaningful time with God reading and meditating on the Bible. She would gently ask Michael, "How was your quiet time today, honey?"

"I just read the Bible quickly today," Michael usually responded. "I'm not finding time to study and meditate."

Before their marriage, Michael would study Scripture for hours at a time. Now with added responsibilities at his workplace and home, he had become too busy. Shama knew growing close to God was essential to becoming a godly husband, so she continued nudging Michael to spend more time with God.

In addition, the first year of marriage is crucial in building the relationship. If a couple doesn't take time for each other to carefully build their marriage, this will affect their long-term relationship with each other. Pre-marital counselling is therefore essential in helping a couple prepare for marriage. A 2009 study by Ted Huston, PhD, concluded:

A decline in love, affection, and responsiveness and an increase in ambivalence within the first two years of marriage can be a predictor for divorce after thirteen years.

A couple can feel unloved if they don't know each other's love language. If they don't know each other's temperament

The New Two

and how each spouse will respond in given situations, this can lead to doubts and dissatisfaction (see section on intimacy with spouse). Male/female differences can lead to more frustration.

This is also the stage when both spouses are in the process of leaving their parents and cleaving to each other, so interference from parents or in-laws can cause lifelong harm or even lead to separation. Both spouses should be careful to confide only with trusted mentors about their marriage issues rather than taking them to their respective families. However loving and mature parents may be, they will typically be biased and support their own son or daughter rather than offering a balanced view.

Aaron and Susan had an arranged marriage. They were from different churches. Aaron's mother was a widow, so they moved into the same house. From the beginning, Aaron's mother interfered in the marriage to the point that Aaron doubted Susan's capabilities of running the home. He would only listen to his mother and joined his mother in verbally abusing Susan. This eventually became physical abuse. Within a year, the couple were separated.

The second pillar of intimacy with spouse can be seriously affected if the couple doesn't put in disciplined time and effort to grow closer to each other during the first year of marriage. Take time to communicate. Take time to resolve conflicts. Take time to enjoy sexual intimacy.

This is hard work. But if this pillar is neglected, the couple may soon slip to the protected singlehood marriage box where both spouses love God and pray for their marriage but don't have time for each other. From there, they can slip further into other insecure matrix boxes where more than one pillar becomes weak like self-dependent marriage or singlehood marriage.

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The same study by Ted Huston cited above also found that couples who divorced within the first two years showed signs of disillusionment and were negative toward one another within the first two months of marriage. Those couples who were still happily married demonstrated positive feelings about their spouses during this early stage of marriage.

Settling into a security matrix box

Because of the various challenges early in marriage, couples may shift from one security matrix box to another. But the goal is to always consciously come back and stay in the most secure marriage box. If a couple slips from here to other boxes, chances are they may slip further into other insecure boxes where the marriage is exposed to the attack of the evil one. If they don't make that effort to return to the most secure marriage box, they will eventually settle in their default security matrix box.

For example, a couple who begins in the most secure marriage box struggles in their relationship with God due to busy lives. They take time with each other but don't find time to pray for their marriage. Within a couple months of marriage, they slip down to the self-dependent marriage box. Another couple is focused on ministry and disciplined about spending time with God, but they are so busy in their respective jobs they don't have time for each other. They are soon settling into the singlehood marriage box.

Asher and Amber were part of a ministry among campus students. They had both come to Christ through this ministry, so they felt they owed the organization an enormous debt. They kept their home open to young college students, who greatly enjoyed the blessings of their hospitality.

"We loved serving these students even though we were tired from our own jobs," said Asher.

"No one told us how important it was as newlyweds to focus on our marriage," Amber added.

Amber eventually gave up her job so they could both refocus on their marriage. Unless young couples realise they are settling into a specific security matrix box that could cost their marriage, they won't take action. Asher and Amber took action and saved their marriage.

Every new couple experiences some marriage-defining

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moments. If they end up making the wrong choices, the couple will settle into security matrix boxes from which it takes great effort to return. A couple with a good relationship but who never learned to take time to pray for their marriage may have settled long ago into the self-confident marriage.

This first stage of marriage is also where emotional baggage comes to the surface, causing hurt and confusion. More often than not, the couple may not even know why some things happen or their spouse is reacting in a certain way. But if this baggage is left unattended, it can turn into a nightmare for the couple

John and Mary entered into marriage with many dreams of establishing a godly Christian home. Mary had lost her parents early in life, so she'd missed out on a normal family upbringing. She was a choleric in temperament (see section on intimacy with spouse) as well as a self-made woman who had always earned her own money. So she naturally took control of the home and marriage and was also very possessive of the money she'd earned before marriage.

While both spouses spent time with God and reading their Bible, Mary's emotional baggage kept her from building an intimate relationship with John. Their marriage quickly slipped to singlehood marriage. Since his sexual needs weren't met, John got hooked on pornography. After ten years of marriage, the couple has settled into the little hope for marriage box.

Power of little habits

This early stage of marriage has no added responsibility of caring for children, so the couple should make it a high priority to establish habits or routines that can bring joy and pleasure and also positively build the marriage. James Clear in his book *Atomic Habits* writes:

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*Habits are the compound interest of self-improvement ...
It is only when looking back two, five, or perhaps ten
years later that the value of good habits and the cost of
bad ones becomes strikingly apparent.*

Joe and Amy decided early in marriage to go for regular walks and talk about their day for fifteen minutes a day. They also decided to fast and pray once a week for each other and the protection of their marriage. After two decades of marriage, both these routines are an integral part of their lives. Even if they miss doing either of these for some reason, they quickly get back to their routine.

As you adopt such habits consistently, they become an inseparable part of your life. Don't underestimate these small habits as they have the power of blessing your marriage for the long run. This first stage of marriage is the time when you sow the right seeds and patiently water them. God will give the increase, growing your marriage into a family that bears fruit and blesses you, your children, and other families by your example.

Take action

If you are in this stage of your marriage, you are in the right time to build your marriage even if you have slipped. This stage has a long runway so you can quickly get up and shake off the dust when you fall. Later in life, this becomes more difficult. I consider this stage a very important phase of marriage because what you can do here you can't postpone to later years. You must invest in your marriage relationship and spiritual life early. Just as occurs with financial investments, what you do early in marriage will compound over the years, giving you big returns later in your married life.

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Spend time with God and his Word. Focus on your personal development. Spend time with each other and keep this a high priority above other competing priorities bound to come your way. Determine which areas in your life are weaknesses that can interfere in your marriage. Discipline yourselves as a couple to pray for each other and the protection of your marriage. Don't neglect any of these three pillars of marriage.

Also, take some time together with your spouse to determine which security matrix box you are in and what you can do to improve. For instance, if you are in the self-confident marriage box where you are both strong in your faith and enjoying each other but haven't found time to pray for your marriage, resolve right now to set aside time daily or weekly to pray for your marriage.

If you are in the singlehood marriage box, which means you don't find time for each other, resolve to pay attention to your marriage on an urgent basis and do the things listed in the section on growing intimacy with spouse. Set aside time as well to pray for your marriage.

The goal is to have a marriage that is secure. As you strive to remain in the most secure marriage box, you will grow strong in your marriage and become best of friends and companions. A secure, healthy marriage can become a blessing to your church, ministry, community, and all those around, not just in your generation but generations to follow.

The New Two

Questions For Discussion

1. If you are newly married or married a few years but still don't have children, in which of the eight security matrix boxes do you believe you've spent the most time?
2. Have you settled into one particular box, or do you find yourselves as a couple moving back and forth?
3. What is causing you both to settle into a specific security matrix box? Your job? Hobbies? Friends? Emotional baggage? Something else? Make as thorough of a list as possible.
4. Have you seen any adverse effects on your marriage of being in an insecure matrix box? What are they?

22. Two Becoming Three

Though I was only looking at a tiny dot, this was the most beautiful scan report I'd seen in my life. My wife was pregnant with our first child, and this amazing dot confirmed it. Thus began a new phase of our married life, something neither of us had ever experienced.

Pregnancy and post-delivery

This phase of marriage begins when the wife becomes pregnant and marks a change that will continue after the baby is delivered and grows into a toddler. The wife goes through morning sickness, tiredness, mood swings, hormonal ups and downs, and changes in her shape. All this can seriously affect intimacy between husband and wife, especially sexual intimacy. While both parents are excited for the baby's arrival, the wife may not feel the same sexual desire as before becoming pregnant, which may leave the husband with unmet needs.

Then the baby comes into the world. The excitement this brings to parents has no boundaries. When our first daughter

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was born eighteen years ago, I remember telling my wife proudly, “I can’t believe it! We’ve become parents!”

Just as when they got married, this new experience brings a whole new set of challenges for the couple. Along with joy, excitement, pleasure, and pride, it brings a whole set of new responsibilities.

Shifting security matrix boxes

Can this wonderful experience affect the marriage relationship? Absolutely! Parenthood has the potential to weaken the bonds of marriage, especially if the couple hasn’t spent enough time and effort building up their marriage during the early years without children. Dave Carder, author of the book *Anatomy of an Affair*, says that fifty percent of all first-time affairs happen in the nine months of pregnancy or the first year after delivery. He explains:

If you think about your wife and what she goes through with pregnancy, it’s very easy to understand. She’s often nauseous the first trimester. She’s more tired. She’s gaining weight. She has a different emotional focus. She has this baby. Sleep deprivation sets in again, and you feel like you slipped down the totem pole in her interests. You’re very vulnerable.

Baby blues, postpartum depression, and other unsettling physical, emotional and behavioural conditions are common for women to experience within the days and weeks after delivery. My wife and I were caught by surprise when she went through some of these as no one had ever warned us about the effect these could have on our marriage.

The second firewall pillar of intimacy with spouse is under

Two Becoming Three

major threat during this period. The marriage can slip to insecure boxes like singlehood marriage where both spouses are just involved in their own lives. When a baby is born, a strong bond is created, especially for the mother. The baby needs attention day and night. This is stressful but fulfilling. The mother becomes absorbed in this new relationship and its challenges, which creates a distraction from the marriage. Neither spouse will be wanting the marriage to get neglected, and in fact all may seem well on the surface. But if the pillar of intimacy with spouse is neglected, this will affect the marriage.

In some cultures in India and other nations, a new mother and her baby will live with the girl's parents for up to three or even six months without the husband. This is done so the new mother can get support from her own mother as she learns the job of being a mother. The focus is on the mother and newborn, but no one cares if the husband's needs are met.

In other cultures, the new mother may be stressed out and exhausted from taking care of her baby without help from anyone, including her husband. Her focus is now the baby, and nothing is more important, not even the marriage. We discussed earlier the hormone called oxytocin, also known as the love hormone (see section on intimacy with spouse), which helps promote bonding between couples. In his book *Anatomy of an Affair*, Dave Carder explains:

Women have the highest ever levels of oxytocin when they are nursing their baby, so they don't need it from their husbands. Husbands' oxytocin levels spike when they are having sex with their spouse—not masturbation or sex with a prostitute.

This explains the prevalence of affairs during pregnancy and a baby's first year. When the wife is absorbed with the

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baby, the husband busies himself with his career. This is a vulnerable time because he is likely interacting more with colleagues, including those of the opposite sex, than his wife.

During this period, the first pillar of intimacy with God and third pillar of prayer cover for marriage may also be affected, causing the marriage to slip to the most insecure marriage box, even if just temporarily. Most mothers at this phase are exhausted and don't find time to read their Bible, let alone meditate. Does it affect her spiritual life? Absolutely!

This is the time when a husband must take the load for both spouses and thereby the marriage. Besides his own spiritual life, he must take out time to nourish his wife's spiritual life. He can read Scripture, share his thoughts, and encourage his wife. He should initiate times of prayer with his wife. This practice can help both stay focused on marriage and not let it slip from the most secure marriage box.

Watch out for the inevitable

The experience of marriage is long-lasting and, Lord willing, permanent. The experience of having a baby is for a short period. But while it may seem temporary, the distraction of having a baby can build a vacuum between husband and wife unless they consciously take time to pay attention to their marriage. For couples who haven't built a good relationship in their pre-child years, having a baby can even further damage the marriage. A woman who has longed for love but never found it in the marriage may find the baby a replacement for her husband. The husband in turn may get even more involved in his career.

The first year of marriage had been difficult for Roshan and Anita. Anita's emotional baggage prevented her from getting close to Roshan. He thought time would heal her issues, which

Two Becoming Three

seemed trivial to him. Their first baby, a girl, was born soon after their first wedding anniversary. Anita had looked forward to being a mother and after the delivery became very involved in caring for the baby. Roshan was also excited about the baby and did what he could to help Anita in raising this child.

But within the next few months, it became apparent to Roshan that Anita loved their daughter more than she loved Roshan. As Anita poured herself into caring for the baby, Roshan put more time into his own job. Their time together came to a standstill. Roshan assumed this was temporary and looked forward to getting back to their intimate moments together. But every time he initiated intimacy, Anita would find excuses. “I’m tired and exhausted. Besides, the baby needs my attention. Please understand.”

One day Anita discovered Roshan watching pornography on his laptop. Furious, she told him, “I will tell the church elders of this evil behaviour of yours.”

Sadly, this is one of many accounts I could share of couples where children who are God’s gift to them have come in the way of a healthy, growing marriage. The second pillar of security, intimacy with spouse, was already weak in this marriage because of Anita’s past emotional baggage, and the baby only further aggravated the situation. They should have first worked on their marriage relationship before planning to have a baby.

Now the marriage that was in the singlehood marriage box has slipped to the little hope for marriage box. This occurs when either or both spouses succumb to temptation because of their waning intimacy with God, which in turn affects their spiritual life and character. Since their marriage is in the back burner, they don’t even pray for their marriage.

From the beginning, marriage needs to be a priority. To bring their marriage into the most secure marriage box and keep it there, a couple must work towards building and

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strengthening the marriage. Just as couples plan in advance for their marriage, it is imperative that a couple plan for their marriage before and after the delivery of their child.

Prevent the inevitable

Thomas and Kate had a lot of adjusting to do in their first year of marriage. In fact, things went so badly they thought divorce was inevitable. Though they loved each other and knew God had joined them in marriage, they struggled. With the help of prayer, patience, love, spending time with God, and godly counselling, they were able to come out victoriously and began growing in intimacy and trust.

Thomas and Kate planned for their first child after two years of marriage. They valued their marriage. Although Kate was often exhausted taking care of the baby, she pushed herself to have intimate moments with Thomas. She knew the marriage would suffer if she neglected this part of their marriage. Thomas did all he could to help Kate in caring for the baby. He would often tell her, “I will take care of the baby now. You take some rest.”

He also took time to listen to Kate. Their first two years of marriage had taught them not to neglect their marriage at any cost. They became closer than before, and the baby never came in the way of their marriage. When they had a second child some years later, their marriage only strengthened.

This second phase of marriage continues for quite a few years. Children need attention as they grow from babies to toddlers to childhood. Simultaneously, the second and third babies arrive, and the parents go through the same cycle. The couple must adjust to this new phase of life where a little neglect can affect the marriage in a big way.

Two Becoming Three

Take action

If you are in this stage of your marriage, you are in the right time to build your marriage even if you have slipped. Keep in mind that this stage is a sowing phase in your marriage so sowing and watering the right seeds into your marriage cannot be postponed. If you miss this opportunity, the direction your marriage takes will be something you never desired.

Take some time together with your spouse to determine which security matrix box you are in. It will be natural in this stage to have slipped from most secure marriage to singlehood marriage, so don't blame yourself or allow the devil to get a foothold in your marriage (Ephesians 4: 26-27).

Since the wife is naturally more distracted with the baby at this moment, the husband should take the initiative to save the marriage. The wife should also recognise the danger and co-operate with the husband. Take time to be intimate as a couple if you haven't been for a long time. The husband can take time to listen to his wife, read from Scripture, a book, or good articles on staying emotionally healthy, marriage, parenting, or other topics that will cheer his wife's mood.

A good marriage provides a strong foundation to parenting. As you continue striving to be in the most secure marriage box, you will grow strong in your marriage and become best friends and companions. This will allow you to start your parenting journey on a positive note. Your next generation depends on you both to provide the example of a godly, healthy marriage.

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Questions For Discussion

1. If you are a new father or mother, do you feel you are neglecting any of the three pillars of intimacy with God, intimacy with spouse, or prayer cover of marriage?
2. If so, what steps can you take to strengthen the pillars that are weak?

23. Mid-life surprise

Gerontology is the study of the social, psychological, and biological aspects of ageing in an adult person. The scientific journals of gerontology published in United States of America revealed that more than one in four people getting divorced in the United States are over fifty years old and half of those divorces happen after twenty years of marriage. Another Pew research study showed that the rate of divorce after age fifty almost doubled from 1990 to 2015.

Does that surprise you? Why would a couple divorce at that age? This stage of marriage is the reaping time, the outcome of sowing, investing, and building the marriage over many years. This is the stage when children will have grown into adolescents or even young adults who are leaving home. The couple, or husband if only he works, will have grown into higher career responsibilities. Physically, the couple may not be at their peak due to health concerns. At this stage, spouses will have come closer or drawn away from each other.

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What you sow, you reap

If a couple has for the most part kept their marriage in the most secure marriage box during the first ten or fifteen years, by this third stage they will definitely enjoy a strong marriage where both spouses have grown in love, understanding, patience, and trust. These couples continue to fill each other's emotional tank with the right love language. They know each other's temperaments and how different or similar they are. They understand their role as husband and wife, father and mother. Sexual intimacy is not casual or need-based but out of love. Romantic feelings continue to be a big part of the marriage. These spouses have become intimate friends who have agape love for each other.

Parenting is a joint project, and a good marriage only strengthens and empowers parenting. Children in such marriages feel secure because of the strong bond between their parents. They know their father and mother are a team who love each other as much as they love their children.

"You both are made for each other," Paul and Jasmine's teenage son Shawn told them.

Paul and Jasmine have been married for eighteen years. They consider marriage a sacred relationship and have been committed to God and to each other. Because they value their marriage, they have prayed for God's protection over their marriage and each other. They have invested in reading books and attending seminars on marriage. They have kept marriage a high priority even after having children. Their teen son and daughter often see their parents spending time together and discussing mundane as well as serious matters. They are happy for their parents and want a marriage just like theirs.

This is an example of a marriage that has stayed largely in the most secure marriage box. In contrast, marriages that have slipped into other boxes for various reasons and have never

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been restored will reap the consequences over the remaining years of the marriage.

For instance, if your marriage has remained largely in the singlehood marriage box over the first decade or two of marriage, you are likely engrossed in jobs, community service, church ministry, active in your social circles, and may even have amassed a lot of wealth. But there is no bond of friendship between the couple. Your children may be grown or perhaps you are still raising teens, but you are most likely not a team in your parenting.

You will also be spending free time watching TV or other activities rather than spending time with your spouse because you don't find that pleasurable. Sex may be completely absent or occasional to satisfy needs rather than to enjoy each other's companionship and grow in marriage. You may be a godly person who spends time praying and reading the Bible and is active in church ministry. But you will sadly not be an example in your married life.

Sanjay and Mary have been married nearly eighteen years and have one son. Sanjay has always been busy with his career while Mary has been a homemaker. They believe in the institution of marriage and have attended seminars and meetings on marriage. But they haven't proactively spent time together building their marriage.

"I've come to doubt if it was God's will for me to marry Sanjay," Mary told a church friend.

The couple spend time with God and pray regularly for each other, but they have failed in spending time together. As a result, their marriage bond is weak. They both love their son, so their attention is focused on his well-being and future.

Firewall Your Marriage

Turnaround

Many couples who have been married for decades, are well respected in their church and community, are people of prayer, and have a close relationship with God still fall into the singlehood marriage or protected singlehood marriage box. These couples may connect well with others, offering help as needed, even sacrificially. But with their own spouses, they are emotionally disconnected and live independent lives.

Other couples fall into the little hope for marriage or even most insecure marriage boxes. They may have started off well, but over the years they have come to live like roommates. Emotional divorce has already taken place, and because of their lack of commitment to God or each other, they are likely to separate.

The only way to turn such marriages around is to recognise that lack of intimacy with each other is the primary cause for the failed marriage and to rebuild what is lost. Spouses who have also failed to grow in intimacy with God have even more work to do. Unless they first reconnect with God, they cannot reconnect with their spouse.

If no effort is taken, there will be no future for these marriages. Many of these couples are hanging on to their children, career, ministry, or community service. Once those things are gone and the couple reaches the “empty nest” stage, if the spouses don’t have each other, they will have only emptiness in their marriage.

Dr. Gary Chapman, best-selling author of *The Five Love Languages*, wrote another book that can be a great resource for couples who feel their marriage has no hope or who aren’t connected to their spouse but want to bring life back to their marriage. *Desperate Marriages: Moving Toward Hope and Healing in Your Relationship* or the revised edition, *Loving Your Spouse When You Feel Like Walking Away*, teaches cou-

Mid-life surprise

ples to better understand their spouse's behaviour, take responsibility for their own thoughts, feelings, and actions, as well as make choices that will have a lasting positive impact on the marriage. Chapman writes:

I believe that in every troubled marriage, one or both partners can take positive steps that have the potential for changing the emotional climate in their marriage.

If this is an area where you are struggling, then go back to the section on intimacy with spouse to be reminded of many other core values in marriage. You will also find a number of other resources, including books on marriage I would highly recommend reading. If your teens or older children haven't yet witnessed a true Christian marriage in your home, this will provide them the opportunity to see a godly marriage as God designed. The choices they make for their own future life partner and marriage will depend on what action you take now.

Reaching greater heights

You may encounter many marriages that seem outwardly encouraging where the couples have invested in their marriage during earlier stages, are closely bonded to each other, and are role-models for the younger generation. Young couples may go to them for counsel. But they may still not be in the most secure marriage box as described earlier. They may still be self-dependent or self-confident marriages. Why? Because they have either drifted away from intimacy with God or don't pray for their marriage. Both self-dependency and self-confidence have their limitations.

If this describes your marriage, review the sections on intimacy with God, prayer cover for marriage, and the most secure

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marriage matrix box. Wherever you are at this stage of your marriage, even if all seems to be fine, strive to remain in the most secure marriage matrix box. Only then will you live a truly fulfilled married life that will reach much greater heights and produce future godly generations.

Mid-life surprise

Questions For Discussion

1. If you are currently in your forties and fifties, are you happy with your marriage?
2. If your answer to the first question is yes, what do you believe is the reason for that answer? Which pillars do you think are strong and are the reason for this happy marriage?
3. If your answer to the first question is no, what do you believe is the reason for that answer? Which of the three pillars do you think may be weak and causing you to be unhappy?

24. Last Lap Last Chance

Psychiatrist Robert Waldinger, a professor of psychiatry at Harvard Medical School, spoke in a Ted Talk about the longest study ever done on happiness by Harvard University. Beginning in the 1930s, the study involved 724 young men ranging from Harvard sophomores to teenagers from poor, disadvantaged Boston families. Sixty participants are still alive, now in their nineties.

The fourth director for this ongoing research, Dr. Waldinger, asks the questions, “What keeps us healthy and happy as we go through life? If you were going to invest now in your future best self, where would you put your time and energy?”

Spanning seventy-five years of questionnaires, interviews, home studies, and medical records, the results of this research are truly amazing. In summary, good relationships keep us happier and healthier. Dr. Waldinger summarises the results into three main principles on relationships.

First, social connections are good for us while loneliness kills. Second, what matters is the quality of the relationship.

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Marriages that are lacking in affection or have high levels of conflict are bad for our health. In fact, such relationships have a worse impact on our health than divorce.

In contrast, close, loving relationships over a long period of time have a positive effect on health. Couples who are most satisfied with their relationships in their fifties are healthier in their eighties. Happily married couples in their eighties handle physical pain better and remain happy despite challenges because of the quality of their relationship. Those in unhappy relationships report more physical pain.

The third principle Dr. Waldinger concludes is that good relationships don't just protect our bodies but our brains as well. People in their eighties who are in secure, loving relationships have sharper minds and better memories. Those who have no other person they can count on in times of need experience earlier loss of memory and mental acuity.

This research study validates God's established institution of marriage. Good health and a fulfilled life come from a fulfilled marriage. This underscores the value of a secure, attached relationship as we've been discussing throughout this book. In other words, it is important to continue living in the most secure marriage matrix box.

Cause and effect

The fourth stage of marriage includes the empty nest years when children have left home, whether before or after you have retired from your job, and the retirement years. This is another stage where a couple reaps the consequences of what they have sowed in the first two stages of marriage. Children are either off to college, careers, or married and living with their spouse. As during the first stage, the marriage is back to just the husband and wife.

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But there is a big difference. The couple is now more mature. Most life goals have been met. They are financially secure if proper financial planning was done in earlier years. If they've reached retirement, the couple no longer has the pressures of a job or career.

Marriage at this stage can be a great joy and pleasure if the couple has built their marriage intentionally during the first three stages. Husband and wife are close friends. They've lived their vows in sickness and health and are now inseparable. They have remained for a long period in the most secure marriage box, and the evil one has not been successful in breaking the firewall in their marriage. This couple has lived out God's great master plan and design for marriage. They have shown that it is possible to maintain joy and excitement in a marriage relationship even after many decades.

Bill and Lucy have been married for more than forty years and have two sons as well as grandchildren. They have spent most of their life in Christian ministry. They help young pastors, families, and youth. They have worked as a team throughout their married life. When their children were small, Bill and Lucy often took them along to camps and seminars where they were ministering to young people.

"Camps and conferences kept us so busy we hardly had time as a family," Bill admits now. "We thought we were doing all that for the Lord, but overcommitting was a mistake."

Bill and Lucy eventually realised the importance of quality time with family and began spending more time with each other and their children. They also never compromised in spending time with God, the family altar, and praying together as a family. Both their sons have placed their faith in Jesus Christ and are following God faithfully. They now have their own families and serve in their local churches.

Bill and Lucy loved each other, but because of their

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ministry commitments, they were not always living in the most secure marriage box. They had slipped to singlehood marriage and later to self-confident marriage. But once they recognised the importance of spending time with family and in prayer, things turned around for their marriage. Today they are a strong family and an example of godly marriage. Their own experience has helped Bill and Lucy in counselling other families going through crisis.

Sadly, many couples don't reach their full potential in marriage even if they have stayed together for forty or fifty years or more. Staying together is no indication that the marriage has been lived to the fullest.

"Your mom and I are busy preparing for our fiftieth wedding anniversary," Dean told his son Fabian. "I'd like you to help us financially in whatever way you can."

Dean and Priscilla were in their seventies. Dean had retired from his job eight years earlier. The couple had lived most of their married life in the most insecure marriage box and were now living a singlehood marriage. They'd disconnected from each other emotionally within the first few years of marriage. Dean went abroad to work while Priscilla remained alone taking care of their children.

When Dean moved back to his hometown home after his official retirement, he became busy with various entrepreneurial ventures. This led to accumulating a lot of debt, which had left the couple financially broke in their old age. Though Dean and Priscilla were living separate lives, Dean wanted to celebrate their fiftieth anniversary as a show to the community and church, where he was still held in high respect for his past activities there.

The last chance

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If you are in this fourth stage of marriage and feel that yours is all over, trust me that it doesn't need to be. You may have read this book despite being in the little hope for marriage box. But even reading a book on building marriage offers hope. It's not too late because God is the designer of your marriage. If this is where your marriage is at, then go back to the sections on intimacy with God, intimacy with spouse, and prayer cover for marriage. These three pillars of a secure marriage is where you need to begin.

Wherever your marriage is at this moment, just keep in mind that neither you nor your marriage are beyond God's grace. God can repair, rebuild, and remodel any marriage because marriage is his design and he specialises in building from nothing. He created the world out of nothing, so he can certainly rebuild your marriage. It is God himself who said in reference to the marriage bond, "*What God has joined, let no man can separate*" (Matthew 19:6; Mark 10:9), and God's success rate is one hundred percent in whatever he does. So if anyone can bring success in your marriage, it is God. No matter what stage of life you are in, I challenge you to trust God for your marriage.

Does it even matter if the marriage is doing great or not at this stage of life? After all, who cares if two middle-aged or elderly spouses show love for each other. Maybe these are thoughts running through your mind.

Well, let me share my perspective. Marriage is not owned by us. God is the Creator and Designer of marriage. So the question should be whether it matters to God if your marriage is fine or not. Does God want your marriage to be revived?

Let me make an analogy. If I had carefully designed a car to the best of my creativity, I would be hurt and disappointed if customers stopped driving it just because they think it's out of style. How much more so for God who designed something

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intended to last from generation to generation. This sacred institution is dear to God, and he expects us to honour our marriage regardless of how old we or our spouse may be. For the sake of God's own glory, we should be pouring into our marriage everything we can to bring back lost intimacy. After all, wouldn't you do the same for your career if it wasn't going the way you wanted it?

If you desire to turnaround your marriage even in this last stage, you must first determine which security matrix box currently describes your marriage. Ask yourself which pillar of marriage is your area of weakness. Is it your commitment to God? Your commitment to your spouse? Prayer for your marriage? Perhaps two pillars are in need of your attention or even all three.

Once you've determined your area of weakness, you need to resolve to work on those areas. For instance, do you have problems with lust? Have you have started watching pornography because your sexual needs aren't met? Do you expect your spouse to meet your needs but don't give to meet his or her needs? Is there unforgiveness and bitterness lingering in your heart for the hurts of the past? A marriage can't come back to life if you hold onto all this baggage.

If you are lacking in the prayer cover pillar, be bold and set time aside to pray with your spouse that God will lovingly revive your marriage. After all, hasn't he promised to answer your prayers when you ask according to his will?

*Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find;
knock, and it will be opened to you. (Matthew 7:7, ESV)*

If intimacy with your spouse is the pillar that needs attention, start filling your spouse's love tank. If you haven't read it yet, get a copy of *The Five Love Languages* by Gary Chapman

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and determine which is your spouse's language. Tell your spouse that you want to rebuild the marriage and ask forgiveness for all those times you have treated your spouse badly. Plan a surprise date or even a vacation if you haven't gone on one for some time.

A turnaround in your marriage can make all the difference in the choices your children make for their own marriages. If you haven't shown them the better side of marriage, they will never know the truth but only believe the lies about marriage they see in the world. A good marriage has the potential to impact multiple generations, and even a last-minute change in direction can impact the course of your own generation. This is your last chance, really!

Firewall Your Marriage

Questions For Discussion

1. If you are retired and living with your wife, how would you assess your marriage? Is it lived well or not?
2. List the reasons for your assessment and what went well or didn't go well in the context of this book.
3. Which of the three firewall pillars would you describe weak in your marriage, and which would you describe as strong?
4. How do you want to reach the end of your life on Earth with regard to your marriage?
5. What would be your one most important piece of advice on marriage to the next generation?

25. Guarantee For A Lifelong Marriage

Intimacy with God. Intimacy with spouse. Prayer cover for marriage. As we've now seen over the past twenty-four chapters, these three pillars are what provide us a secure firewall in marriage. Finally, a guarantee for a lifelong marriage!

Such a marriage will never separate because it is lived according to God's ways, believing in God's original design, and doing those things that will lead to a proactive, healthy marriage that will bring protection to the marriage. As we bring this book to a close, let's look just one more time at each of the pillars that create a firewall for marriage.

Intimacy with God

The married couple who believes that intimacy with God is crucial for the marriage will work towards developing that intimacy. This begins with a personal relationship with Jesus Christ the Son of God, which occurs only once you have given your heart to Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour. Couples who

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are intimate with God will make the following a priority in their lives.

- They will spend as often as they can listening to God and also sharing their deepest feelings with God as a daughter or a son to a father or a mother.
- They will spend daily quiet time reading, studying, and meditating on the Scriptures.
- They will place high priority on growing in their personal relationship with God compared to their career, ministry, or other interests throughout the different stages of their marriage.

As each spouse does these simple things, they will bond increasingly with God, and he will provide this couple strength and power to overcome any heart issues holding them back and to live a victorious life and marriage. Because of their intimacy with God:

- They will be committed to the marriage and will never separate until death sunders them apart.
- They will have victory over many temptations that can harm the marriage.
- They will give to each other sacrificially.
- They will be transparent with each other and have no secrets.
- They will make forgiveness a way of life.
- They will be patient and tolerate each other always.
- They will show meekness and gentleness in their marriage even when they believe themselves to be in the right and the other to be wrong.

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- Their humility will continue to grow while their egos decrease.
- Their marriage will be ruled by agape love.

Intimacy with Spouse

The couple who believes that intimacy with their spouse is critical for the marriage to survive will work towards developing that intimacy. This begins the day they get married and doesn't stop there. This couple believes that a wedding may be a single day but marriage is for a lifetime. Because of their intimacy with their spouse:

- They will invest in their marriage early, spending time, effort, and finance to build their marriage.
- They won't give up on their marriage but are committed to the institution of marriage come what may.
- They believe marriage holds the highest priority among all relationships second only to their relationship with God and followed by their relationship with their children.
- They will sow seeds of love and commitment in the first two stages of marriage and reap the benefits in the next two stages of marriage.
- They become best of friends and inseparable companions.

The couple who grows in intimacy with their spouse will develop a natural glue that unites the marriage until death separates them. Because of their intimacy with each other:

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- They emotionally detach from their parents and become as one flesh with each other.
- They learn to appreciate their uniqueness as male and female and value each other as equals despite differences in temperament and personality.
- They have identified each other's different needs and make every effort to satisfy those needs to the fullest.
- The wife knows how important respect and honour is for her husband and respects him with words and actions.
- The husband knows how important loving his wife is and often tells her how much he loves her and does things that show he loves her.
- They know each other's love language and actively fill each other's emotional tank.
- Sexual intimacy and giving pleasure is an important part of marriage for both spouses.
- They recognise conflicts are an inevitable part of the marriage and actively work to resolve conflict.
- They consider communication an integral part of the marriage and communicate on all three levels of communication.
- They recognise that money doesn't belong to each other but God, and both participate in becoming co-partners in stewardship of their finances.

Prayer cover for marriage

This couple believes that prayer cover for marriage is not an option but an essential part of marriage that will provide a

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divine protection the evil one cannot penetrate. Because they are committed to prayer for their marriage:

- They believe there is only one enemy and the battle is not against each other but against the spiritual forces of darkness.
- They join hands together as one team to fight this enemy.
- They recognise the day of evil when it happens and take all care so that trivial quarrels don't turn into violence.
- They pray for each other's spiritual life, weaknesses, needs, and aspirations.
- They pray specifically for protection of their marriage, no matter how good or bad the situation is. They don't stop praying when things are fine.
- They are not overconfident but take time to pray in every stage of their life and marriage, not just when they are young but also as they grow old.
- They recognise that God works through prayer, so they pray consistently and persistently.

Because the couple is actively covering their marriage with prayer:

- The spiritual forces of darkness are unable to harm the marriage because they are protected.
- Worldliness and temptations from the opposite sex cannot bring harm to the marriage.
- They live a strong, victorious married life despite the ups and downs in marriage.

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Preserving the Most secure marriage

The goal for every marriage should be to guard and strengthen the three pillars of marriages—intimacy with God, intimacy with spouse, and prayer cover for marriage—throughout our lives so that our marriage will always stay in the most secure marriage security matrix box. Only while remaining in this box will a couple reach the length, breadth, and depth of marriage God intended.

To maintain your marriage in the most secure marriage box, commit yourselves as a couple to review your marriage periodically. This could be every month or every two months. Prayerfully carry out checks on how each of you are doing on these three pillars. The marriage is only as strong as the weakest link, so if even one of you is weak in any of the three pillars, your marriage will weak. Both of you must strive to keep all three pillars strong.

As we come to the end of this journey through biblical and practical principles of marriage, may the powerful protection of the “firewall” in your marriage be felt by you as a couple, by your children, grandchildren, and following generations. May the loving warmth of your intimate relationship with God and spouse become a fire that will spread from generation to generation as you pass on the legacy of a strong and secure marriage.

Mark and Sharon

“Happy wedding anniversary to you both!” Mark and Sharon’s oldest daughter Natalia announced merrily. “I can’t believe you’ve been married for twenty-one years already.”

Mark and Sharon had taken their two daughters, eighteen-year-old Natalia and fifteen-year-old Alicia, out to an exclusive restaurant to celebrate their anniversary. Seated beside her sister on the opposite side of the table from her parents, Alicia

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smiled mischievously. "I know! You look so young, like a pair love birds, not nearly old enough to be our parents."

"Well, at least you don't act old enough," Natalia added with a chuckle.

Sharon gave a mock frown. "Why do you say that, Natalia?"

"It's just that you still act like newly-weds sometimes," Natalia answered.

"That doesn't sound so bad." Sharon exchanged a loving smile with Mark.

"It's embarrassing," Alicia said with a mock pout.

"It just shows that your mother and I still love each other even after twenty-one years," Mark said firmly. He looked from one daughter to the other. "Actually, I want to ask you both something important today."

"Sure!" the girls chorused.

With solemnity, Mark asked, "What legacy do you two girls feel your mom and I are leaving with you that you would want to pass on to your next generation?"

The seriousness of his tone brought thoughtful silence for several seconds. Then Natalia spoke up. "I think more than anything the legacy of your marriage. I've always hoped I'd have a marriage as loving and romantic as yours someday."

"I agree." Alicia nodded emphatically. "I think your marriage is indeed a legacy Natalia and I would both want to pass on."

Mark and Sharon exchanged glances, their eyes moist. Then Mark inquired with a smile, "Sharon, do you remember when you asked me—oh, it must have been fifteen years ago at least back when Natalia was a toddler and Alicia just a baby—whether I could guarantee that our marriage would never separate?"

"Actually, I do!" Sharon responded, laughing. "Mainly

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because we spent the rest of the evening with you reading to me from a book on marriage. All about the three pillars necessary to build a firewall of protection for our marriage.”

“You do remember!” Mark exclaimed. Grinning widely, he gestured to their two daughters. “As to your question, I’d say the next generation has already answered it for you. You and I have passed on a legacy to our children. Here is the guarantee you asked for, ma’am.”

All four laughed. Then Natalia said briskly, “Hey, let’s get a picture of this legacy!”

Pulling out her smartphone, Natalia took a picture of Mark and Sharon smiling lovingly at each other, then labelled it in her smartphone: “Firewall in marriage.”

“Okay, now the next generation of legacy!” she announced.

Getting up, the four squeezed close together, their arms around each other. Holding her smartphone out as far as possible, Natalia ordered, “Okay, everyone, look at the camera and smile.”

Snapping a selfie, she showed it to her parents and sister with satisfaction, then carefully labelled it in her smartphone: “Firewall in family.”

Thank you

Thank you for reading Firewall Your Marriage.
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References Mentioned in this Book for Further Reading:

1. *Case for Marriage* by author Linda J. Waite
2. *Intimate Allies* by author Dan B Allender
3. *Love and Respect* by author Dr Emerson Eggerichs
4. *Answers to Marriage* by authors Bruce and Carol Britten
5. *Men are from Mars; Women are from Venus* by author John Gray
6. *Spirit Controlled Temperaments* by author Tim LaHaye
7. *His Needs and Her Needs* by author Willard F. Harley, Jr.
8. *Acts of Marriage* by author Tim LaHaye
9. *Enjoy! The Gift of Sexual Pleasure for Women* by authors Dr Cliff and Joyce Penner
10. *Power of a Praying Wife* and *Power of a Praying Husband* by author Stormie Omartian
11. *Defending Your Marriage* by author Dr. Tim Muehlhoff
12. *Destined for the Throne* by author Paul Billheimer
13. *Atomic Habits* by author James Clear
14. *Anatomy of an Affair* by author Dave Carder
15. *The Five Love Languages* by author Dr Gary Chapman
16. *Desperate Marriages: Moving Toward Hope and Healing in Your Relationship* by author Dr Gary Chapman
17. *Loving Your Spouse When You Feel Like Walking Away* by author Dr Gary Chapman

Other Resources Referenced in Book:

1. James Dobson's *Family Talk* emphasising the importance of strong families for good of the society
2. National Survey of Children's Health (NSCH), carried out in the United States by the National Centre for Health Statistics
3. Study published in *Journal for Men's Health*
4. The Holmes and Rahe Stress Scale citing death of a spouse as most stressful
5. www.guardian.com article referring researchers at the universities of Nevada and Michigan in the United States who did research on three hundred-seventy-three heterosexual couples over the first sixteen years of marriage.
6. Dr John Gottman from the Gottman Institute's research on studies carried out on more than thousand couples
7. Patrick Fagan, PhD senior fellow and director of the Marriage and Religion Research Institute

Other Resources Referenced in Book:

- (MARRI), major study on the effects of pornography in marriage.
8. Ted Huston, PhD study on couples in first two years of marriage
 9. The scientific journals of gerontology published in United States of America that revealed that more than one in four people getting divorced in the United States are over fifty years old and half of those divorces happen after twenty years of marriage
 10. Pew research study showing the rate of divorce after age fifty
 11. Psychiatrist Robert Waldinger, a professor of psychiatry at Harvard Medical School, Ted talk study on happiness